



him in those fits of depression to which he was so liable? Who to play and sing to him when tired? And then Breezie knit her brows, and pondered over what was to become of the shirts and buttons, when her active fingers were no longer forthcoming.

Cis had sat musing for some time. He had not at first thought of what Travers' visits portended; but he was of course quite aware of what they meant now. Well, they might make up enough to scramble along on. It was rather a foolish thing; but still if Breezie was in earnest about it, he had nothing to say against it. Then the painful thoughts recurred; yes, cost what it might, Breezie must know all that sad story now. The girl shouldn't be crushed with that revelation of shame coming upon her after she was married, perhaps, for all he could tell, from unloving lips.

"Breezie, dear," he said, at length; "come here, I want to talk to you. Get that low chair, and sit down beside me."

"This is better," laughed the girl, drawing a foot-stool close to his chair. "My own little stool of repentance. What am I to be lectured about, papa? or what are we going to do?"

"My darling," he replied, "you are going to listen to a very sad story, as painful for me to tell, as for you to hear. Before I begin, I want you to understand that I love you very dearly, and that nothing can shake that love. Even if I was not of kin to you, Breezie, I could not love a daughter more dearly than I do you. You know that, don't you?"

"Of course, papa; haven't I been your pet always; but I don't understand—" the girl's eyes opened, and her face looked very serious. The mournful, solemn tones in which Langton spoke—the earnest, troubled expression of his face, all prepared her to listen to something grave.

"You never heard me speak of your mother, Breezie. It is of her I am going to talk to you now. Many years ago, when I was at the University, or rather on a reading excursion from it, I first fell in with her. She was not the least like you. A

CHAPTER I.

THE GHOST OF DUNNINGTON HALL.

DRIP, drip, drip! the rain splashed on as if it never meant stopping. London had already arrived at as much daylight as is consistent with a wet November day, and the view from Mr. Frank Forbes's chambers in the Temple was certainly depressing. That gentleman, one of the "just called," was pacing his apartment in anything but a happy frame of mind, and puffing savagely at a short clay pipe.

"Disgusting!" he exclaimed, as he paused for the twentieth time to look out at the unpromising day. "What the deuce is a fellow to do? As if London wasn't bad enough in November without this sort of thing. Well, if I had gone down to my uncle's at Wildmore, shooting would have been very poor fun such weather as this—kind of day a fellow's profession ought to stand to him. Why don't some one send a brief?"

A man's step, and a man's voice humming "The Young May Moon," were now heard in the passage. A sharp tap at the door, and the new comer entered.

"Halloa, Tom!" said Frank Forbes, "charmed to see you again: but I thought you were in Berkshire."

"So I was. Only got back last night—found this in the letter-box, and so came over to you. Read it;" and he handed Forbes an open letter.

Tom Lytlereck had been called to the Bar some four or five

cumbed, and was sent ashore in a state unbecoming one of 'the faithful' and a believer in the Koran."

"I should think that mixture would finish most men?" said Jack.

"Suppose it would; it don't sound wholesome, does it? Well, here we are close to Tophana, and what's more to the point, in excellent time for dinner. I don't know how you feel, but I am in a state of raging hunger. It's an amiable weakness, too, that the more one indulges here the better, as when we get back to the Army, appetites rather predominate over food. How I should astonish the coffee-room at the Thermopolium. Why, old Carribosh there, who passes his day trying to get fit for white-bait and venison in the season, would expire with envy on seeing my magnificent capacity. I recollect his describing to me, almost with tears in his eyes, some man he had met at a big city feed. 'Went in three times for venison, sir, he did, after the turtle, I'll give you my honour.'"

The two friends did ample justice to Mrs. Misseri's *cuisine*. The usual *canard* of a desperate sortie at the front was of course served up with the side dishes, giving rise naturally to an animated discussion as to who had got the best of it, which the whole thing being probably apocryphal, left, as may be supposed, a good deal to be said on both sides.

Late in the evening, when they were smoking in the ante-chamber, two or three men came in evidently rather excited. Coningsby raised his glass, and recognising one of them, inquired—

"Halloa! what's the row, Richardson?"

"Oh, nothing," replied the man addressed; "I'm only cursing myself for being such an idiot, as to be about the streets of Pera after dark without a real good stick. I never was till to-night, and then of course I wanted it."

"Sit down and tell us all about it."

"Oh, I have nothing much to tell beyond a bit of good luck. We were coming out of the opera, and I had over my shoulder

years back, and had at once made up his mind that that was as far as he wished to go in the profession. Having embraced it originally to please his friends, he now neglected it to please himself, and being in possession of a small independence, was enabled to do as he liked on that point. For the rest he still called himself a barrister; kept chambers in the Temple; was seen a good deal at Richmond and in the Park during the season; assisted with great regularity at the carnival of Epsom and the more decorous festival of Ascot; had a numerous and very varied acquaintance; and in the autumn lived a wandering life amongst country houses, where he assisted greatly in the promotion of private theatricals, the destruction of partridges, the support of country balls, or anything, as he expressed it, that "gave signs of vitality in the rural districts."

"Who's it from?" inquired Forbes, as he took the letter.

"My cousin, Charlie Repton; he wants us to go down there for the Moretown ball. Give me a pipe while you see what he says."

"Well," said Forbes, as he finished the letter, "nothing so much more disgusting than the state of things here. I vote to go; Dunnington with a cheery party beats the Temple in November."

"Go! of course we'll go," replied Tom. "I'll scribble a line by to-day's post to Charlie to say we'll be there for dinner to-morrow."

"Let me see. Repton's an only son, I know. Has he got any sisters?"

"Only one—Agnes."

The next afternoon saw our two friends speeding along the Great Northern, bound for Moretown Station, Blankshire, from whence a waggonette conveyed them to Dunnington.

Dunnington Hall is a fine, though quaint old building, standing, not like most country houses, in a park, but in the middle of the village. Passing through a low square gate-tower, a short gravel-drive brings you to the house, a long rectangular

had been playing for considerably more than counters of late.

Your indolent men who hate trouble, on these occasions are something like the men who rarely play, when they do begin, they do it with a vengeance. Charlie Repton had sauntered through almost as many flirtations as he was years old. Few of them had given him a moment's uneasiness, and even those few had but little disturbed his equanimity. At last he was really in earnest—he had thrown the prize away when he might have won it; but had doggedly persisted in the pursuit ever since. He had wilfully shut his eyes to what the consequences might be, and had dreamily resolved to drift with the tide wherever it might lead him. He made no disguise to himself, and admitted that he loved Belle better than any other woman he ever saw. A hundred times a day he cursed his own vacillation of purpose; but for that, he knew Belle might now have been his wife. As it was, he didn't know, and declined to think how it might all end. He only knew that to win Belle, he was prepared to sacrifice anything and everything. If the thought crossed his mind of what she must sacrifice, he impatiently dismissed it as something unpleasant to reflect upon. A mode of dealing with such difficulties that keeps a good many consciences easy.

Belle took one last peep at her glass, and ran down stairs. Even in dismissing an admirer, a woman would fain look her best. He was leaning lazily on the mantel-piece as she entered, but advanced to receive her.

"Pray sit down," she observed, as she took possession of a low lounging chair. "Don't walk about and make me uncomfortable."

"Too glad, I'm sure. I hate locomotion, and know it's bad for the carpets. How well you're looking!"

And she did look well in her fresh morning muslin, with the dark masses of her hair turned back, and braided behind into the old classical knot that you may see on the old Greek

building of red brick, having a quaint pepper-box turret at each angle. You enter through a small lobby into a very fine hall, decorated with old armour and a good deal of carved oak. This hall is in the centre of the building, occupying the whole breadth of the rectangle, and over it runs a long oak gallery; the consequence is, that to get from the rooms on one side of the house to those on the other, you must either cross the hall on the basement story or the long gallery above it. This large hall and gallery over it have been often condemned as a great waste of room, and undoubtedly the house has not the accommodation you would have expected from its outside appearance; but then the hall is just the place for a billiard table, and the gallery, with its polished floor of old oak, is such a place for a valse, to say nothing of battledore and shuttlecock, or of its capabilities for transformation into a theatre at short notice, that, take it all round, there are few more cheery country houses than Dunnington Hall.

Running up against one side of the building is a magnificent standard holly, which, passing the windows of the great gallery, has its top proudly level with the roof. It stands a little to the right of the entrance. Connected with this holly there is a story, of which we shall hear more by and bye; in the meanwhile, do not forget its situation.

"Deuced glad to see you. How do you do, Frank?" and Charlie Repton stepped forward, cue in hand, to welcome them as they entered the hall.

He was a good-looking fellow, about eight-and-twenty, who took life very easily—fond of shooting, hunting, &c., as long as it was attainable without much trouble; but Charlie was a very Sybarite in his pursuit of pleasure. The run of the season would not compensate for twenty miles to cover, in his philosophy; and at a similar distance, the prettiest girl in all Blankshire keeping the after supper valse for him, would have had a poor chance against an easy chair, a regalia, and the last popular novel.

SCUTARI HOSPITAL.

one. With my London talk, and the assurance of tw I was soon voted a great card in that little province. How swagger and impertinence assert their rights c men, you know as well as I. Young men were scar parts, and with those there were I could hold my c athletic sports, and give a good two stone besides wh to the ball room. After riding the winner of the h in the local races, and proving myself a decent stro second four in the regatta, I had established myse. muff, and something beyond 'a carpet knight.'

"Still, I believe that nothing gave me so much cred. retort I made to a young lady, who maliciously volunteer me the information that Miss Rawson was engaged, to w 'Of course she is; you could scarcely suppose I would reck myself amongst the admirers of any woman, whose charn were not at least recognised that much.'

"That it was the first I had heard of it, I need scarcely more observe, than the rapidity with which my remark was repeated. That sort of thing flies like wild-fire, and if the men d—n you for your chëek, the women rather admire you for your impertinence. I must apologise for my egotistical moralizing," he continued, with a faint smile, "but if I haven't a right to moralize now, one never has."

Cis merely nodded.

"From that out, I made downright love to Lucy. I knew nothing of whom she was engaged to, and cared less. My slight experience of women, gained in by no means a good school, had taught me to place little reliance on their constancy, and a good deal on my own audacity. I began it simply as an amusement; I wound up by falling head-over-ears in love with her. Pardon me, Langton, but Lucy was a flirt by nature. She was weak in character as ever woman was; a lover at hand to her unstable nature would always eclipse one absent. She was at this time staying, as you are doubtless aware, with her aunt, a foolish worldly woman, who, in her foolishness, thought me a

"Train pretty punctual, I see; wants ten minutes to the dressing-bell. Have a glass of sherry after your drive;" and Charlie rang.

"Not a bad idea. Who have you got staying here? How's Agnes, and when's the ball?" responded Tom.

"Can't you ask one question at a time, instead of converting yourself into a regular edition of Mangnall? Agnes I shall leave to report on her own health; the ball's to-morrow, and as for the people, I thought I told you all that in my letter. The Breretons are the only addition. You know them."

"Yes; jolly girls, rather. Old Brereton, I should think, looks upon the odd trick as the great end of life; and now I'm off to dress;" and Tom, who was evidently quite at home, bustled out of the hall, leaving Forbés to the care of Charlie Repton.

Clang goes the bell from one of the pepper-box turrets, and the party is rapidly mustered in the dining-room. Glance your eye down the table, and let us examine them.

Charlie Repton is flirting disgracefully with Mrs. Inglemere, five-and-twenty, a widow and brunette, with such a pair of eyes! Charlie would be perfectly imbecile to neglect such an opportunity. Well, we cannot find fault with him on that score, as, judging from appearances, he is evidently "doing all he knows."

Then there are the two Clippington girls, *mignonne*, fair, capital figures, and with deep blue eyes—that deep, deep blue that verges on black. Minnie and Laura were two country-born young ladies, who had latterly lived a good deal abroad, and who, having grafted foreign habits on sporting propensities, had acquired the reputation of being extremely fast. They were both pretty, rode well, carried valseing as near volition as practicable, sang a little, drew a little, hated humbug, had lots to say for themselves, and were not afraid to say it, had but short patience with stupid partners, and none at all with "bad goers," as Laura said.

or four roll over never to rise again, the skirmishers retire still rapidly dropping. The truth flashes across Herries.

"We are beat back!" he exclaimed, "and the skirmishers are covering the retreat."

"What the devil's all this!" cried Jack, as the sharp, continuous rattle of musketry on the left fell upon their ears.

"It is Eyre's brigade, who have taken the cemetery, and penetrated the suburbs; they can go no further; to advance is destruction, the French are beaten back at the Malakoff, the English at the Redan. Retreat is impossible. It is broad daylight now, and they would be mowed down by the batteries; there is nothing for it but to remain there till nightfall, passing the day in incessant skirmishing with the enemy, jealous as ever of losing a few yards of ground."

Extraordinary is the lull that seems to take place by eleven A.M., the furious cannonade that has been maintained without intermission for forty-eight hours by the allies has utterly died away. The savage storm of shot, shell, and canister, so profusely lavished by the Russians some two or three hours ago, has entirely subsided. It is a glorious summer day. An occasional random shot from either side is all that remains of the tempest of the morning. It reminds one of a "white squall" in the deceitful Mediterranean, with its hereafter of bright sunshine, blue, dancing waters, and low rumblings, to that which had anon been a seething cauldron of foam 'neath a sky as black as Erebus; and to keep up the metaphor, the sun pours down his burning rays on those poor, splintered fragments of the wreck.

The stretchers have been busy this morning, and their canvas is stained blood red in proof of their industry; but yet the eye may see many a scarlet clad warrior lying out in the open who has dropped in his tracks like the stricken deer. Some of these figures move from time to time uneasily, others lie motionless in the grim foreground of that picture; and the sun shines bright, and the wearied trench guards sleep. No birds sing

"Stupid, poor things, they were born, and talking to a mild extent they may deem a necessity ; but dancing is an acquired taste, and when you can't do it, or don't like it, inflicting misery on your fellow-creatures is inexcusable."

It was, perhaps, Laura's too ready tongue more than anything else that had obtained for them the reputation of being "fast ;" but she was a clever girl. Her mother had died almost before Laura could recollect, and showing a little contempt for "the conventionalities," was a temptation she always found so difficult to resist. Flirting, I need scarcely say, they both had reduced to a science. After all, as a general rule, it is a very harmless amusement, and if there be some few sufferers, why, whatever the game, somebody will now and then be hurt. Flirtation is but two persons of opposite sexes exercising all their powers of pleasing on each other. Of course, a mistake occurs occasionally, one or the other forgets they are but playing for sugar-plums, and begins staking the gold pieces in earnest. What would you have? We cannot all keep our heads and play cool.

"To fall in love is much easier than to get rid of it," saith the French philosopher, *hinc illæ lachrymæ*.

What are termed fast young ladies are, for the most part, cruelly libelled. Because they dare to say a little of what they know and think, and to break through the upper crust of formality that surrounds society ; because they presume to feel bored and sick of platitudes, and show it, the "foolish virgins" who do not think and cannot talk, the respectable matrons who vegetate in country places where the flood-tide of civilization hath not yet reached, hold up their hands and exclaim, "shocking," "forward," &c., till they culminate in the epithet of "fast."

But away with such moralizing ; the *entrées* are going round, and the champagne sparkles in the glasses. Old Brereton is explaining an abstruse point of whist to the rector, who is fond of a rubber—the "Vienna Coup," perhaps. The Miss Brere-

tons are looking pretty ; they come, perhaps, under the head of the " foolish virgins," who cannot talk ; but then, do not the Easterns tell us that " silence is golden." Old Mr. Repton is detailing the absurdity of that last poaching case he submitted to the Moretown bench, having been disposed of with " a month," when " three, sir, would not have been half enough for the scoundrel !" Frank Forbes and Minnie Clippington are deep in theatricals, while Lyttlereck seems to be getting on very satisfactorily with Laura.

" No, Mr. Lyttlereck, you don't quite understand me. I didn't say that I was a judge of character. I meant that I can hardly understand anybody with brains not to a certain extent studying character. Of course, not in every case ; for some people, poor things, don't seem to have any. I don't speak morally," laughed Laura.

" Though you might ; but I see what you mean. I was in Edinburgh some few months ago ; there I met an old banker, Macpherson by name. How delighted you would have been with him. I revelled in him. The first time I met him, a young lady we all knew was under discussion. She was a nice enough girl, but I'm afraid no favourite of his, for he suddenly summed up and gave judgment in these words: ' She's just a born idiot ; she can neither play the piano nor haud the candle.' "

" Neither useful nor ornamental would be, I suppose, the southern translation."

" Yes ; but how extremely destitute of force after the racy and epigrammatic diction of my friend."

Mrs. Repton's head here bent, and the ladies rose.

" How late you all are," said Agnes Repton, as the gentlemen entered the drawing-room. " Now do make haste with your tea, we are going to dance in the gallery."

" Yes, we want to see if you are as good at the *deux temps* as at sketching character, Mr. Lyttlereck. In fact, Agnes, we really must know what reliable valsers we have for to-morrow night," said Laura, with much gravity.

"Will you honour me with a turn?" asked Tom, rather amused.

"With pleasure. Don't you think the *deux temps* ought to be a leading subject in the competitive examinations? I would give two thousand marks for proficiency, and I believe they would, only you men are afraid that we should carry off all the prizes. Fancy our getting all the civil service things and commissions. How we should improve the bands."

"Well, haven't we thrown open the Universities to you?"

"Oh, yes; but then you see, we don't so much care about being clergymen till we begin to get old," said Laura, demurely, "and I don't think, as a rule, we should look well in wigs, if we went to the bar."

"Now, Tom, I'll give you a lead," said Charlie Repton, as he whirled by with Mrs. Inglemere.

"A fair challenge," said Tom, and he followed with his partner down the gallery.

"Not so bad," said Laura, as they stopped. "You can valse; but tell me, have you been at a Moretown ball before? Shall we have either a decent room, or decent music?"

"It's a fair room, and this time the music will be good, for Charlie is one of the stewards, and has barred Pandean pipes and the violin resources of the neighbourhood. *Apropos* to studying character, I always pick up a good story at a country ball."

"Charming, don't forget our mission to-morrow night. Blending instruction, no—improvement, that's the word, with pleasure."

"The proper study of mankind is man,"

quoted Tom, imbecilely.

"No such thing, sir, it's woman, and what dreadful geese you do make of yourselves, when you pretend to understand us."

"Quite right, I never think a man in real danger till he

affects that knowledge ; it's generally combined with youth and inexperience."

"Laura, Laura !" exclaimed Mrs. Inglemere, "do come and look at this picture. He was so delightfully wicked, and he walks about this gallery all night, and throws people out of window if he catches them, doesn't he?"

"Not exactly," replied Charlie Repton ; "but I'll tell you the legend if you'll come and have some wine and water in the drawing-room."

A general move was now voted in favour of Charlie's story and refreshment.

"Fire away," said Tom, as he handed some sherry and water to Laura, "we are all armed now against excess of prosi-ness."

"Mr. Lyttlereck, you must be banished to the gallery if you interrupt in this way," cried Mrs. Inglemere.

"Hold your tongue, Tom, and look interested," laughed Agnes. "Now, Charlie, with all the horrors. Spoil somebody's dreams, we can't afford to have our ghost laughed at."

"Well," said Charlie, "in the days of Charles II., the Derringtons were lords of Dunnington. The then peer was a hard-drinking cavalier, and as little likely as most men to look with a severe eye on the escapades of his eldest son ; yet the Hon. Herbert had proved not only too much for him, but even the dissolute society of that Court voted the Hon. Herbert to have gone even beyond the extremely liberal license they allowed. Whatever did duty for Tattersall's, Ascot, and Baden in those days, I don't quite know ; but as history tells us, even in the time of the Romans their equivalents were perfectly understood—"

"That'll do, Charlie," interrupted Laura Clippington. She always called him Charlie on the strength of a mythical cousinship. "That'll do, keep that for the next penny readings at the Moretown Institute."

"Ah, I forgot you were past improvement. Well, the Tat-

tersalls and Baden of those days speedily finished Herbert Derrington. Now, though impecuniosity was even then a crime, yet people did not drop Herbert Derrington for that; when rumours were rife that he occasionally rode by the light of the moon *à la* Duval, and finally when he lost and didn't pay, the world agreed that they could bear with Herbert Derrington no longer, and that he must be cast out from among them. With his father he had quarrelled irreconcilably some time before, and what now became of him nobody knew. Occasional rumours of his having been seen in some of the most vilely dissolute haunts of London were heard; but in this part of the world he had not been seen for years. In due course of time the old lord took his departure through the medium of gout and strong potations, after the manner of those days. Some months elapsed, and then the new lord arrived with a troop of servants. The old hall was soon filled with a set whom the neighbouring gentry voted more than questionable. They drank deep, and played deeper, were readier with a rapier than a cheque, whilst a pale face turned up to heaven, and a sword thrust through an embroidered waistcoat might occasionally be seen midst a flushed and disordered group 'neath the big holly as the sun rose. The Hon. Herbert had ever been of a saturnine countenance; but now he waxed grimmer and grimmer. He sneered at his guests, and grew bitter in his cups. If the cards ran against him formerly, he was fast friends with them now; the dice came at his call, and he swept up the broad pieces nightly with a mocking laugh that was bad to listen to. Dark stories were rife about unfair play and unfair duels, and the jeering, saturnine Lord Derrington was looked upon by the neighbourhood with mingled feelings of fear and distrust.

"Now, ladies, out with your pocket handkerchiefs, I am coming to the pathetic part."

"Now, pray go on, Mr. Repton, I'm so interested," said the widow.

"Yes, go on, Charlie. I do so want to see you do the pathetic."

"Well, with your eyes, Mrs. Inglemere, a handkerchief's a mistake," continued Charlie, calmly ignoring Laura's remark.

"Let's see, where was I?"

"On eyes," said Laura, quietly.

The widow coloured slightly, and Charlie resumed :

"The prettiest girl in those days, for miles round, was Mary Malcolmson. She lived with her grandfather in a neat cottage in what was then the Chase. Her father had fallen fighting with the old Lord at the fatal field of Naseby ; her mother had died while Mary was still young, and she had been brought up by her grandfather, who was still nominally head-keeper or ranger. She was betrothed to one of the under-rangers. One evening, about sunset, Mary left the cottage, telling her grandfather she should be back in half-an-hour ; but days passed, and she never returned. She was sought far and wide—her lover was in despair—ponds were dragged, but all in vain ! nothing could be seen or heard of Mary.

"It was about ten days after her mysterious disappearance that her betrothed, a bold, determined fellow, was coming moodily up the village. The moon shone brightly, and the straggling hamlet was almost as visible as if it were day. He had arrived within some twenty yards of the low-arched gateway leading to the Hall, when the wicket was thrown violently open, and a man, his eyes starting from his head, and his face blanched with terror, almost ran into his arms.

"'The ghast, the ghast !' was all he could mutter, while his limbs shook, and his teeth rattled from fear.

"While the keeper yet tried to pacify him, Lord Derrington and his confidential servant came to the wicket, cast a hasty glance at the ghost-seer, and inquired whether any one had passed. The keeper answered in the negative, and his lordship, with a savage execration, turned back to the Hall. The keeper had by this time recognised the man as a helper in the stables,

and when he had partially recovered from his fright, his story was this. He was coming down the drive when he heard a cry behind him, and saw something white (or, as he called it, the 'ghoast,') spring from the top windows of the house and disappear into the big holly; then he heard moans which were succeeded by curses and mocking laughter—then he could stand it no longer, and fled.

"Before the end of that night, more than one villager had seen the 'ghoast,' and in the morning Mary Malcolmson was found bleeding and senseless on the steps of her grandfather's cottage. She lingered a few days, but was never fairly in her senses. Still, enough was gathered from her wandering incoherent talk to show that Lord Derrington's people were her abductors, and that to escape his lordship's persecutions she had thrown herself from the window of the long gallery just opposite the holly. The tree broke her fall, and she escaped into the shrubbery, though fearfully bruised and lacerated; but the shock to her nerves proved fatal.

"Her lover disappeared on the day of her funeral, and some two months afterwards Lord Derrington and his friends were rudely disturbed by the incursion of an armed and masked band. His lordship and his friends were all men to whom cold steel was no novelty, and though caught rather like rats in a trap, they made up their minds to die hard. A desperate struggle took place, in which they divided into two parties. One lot cut their way through their assailants and escaped, while Derrington and the others were driven upstairs to the gallery, there most of them were killed. The legend goes on to say that the ex-keeper, who was their leader, with a refinement of vengeance, strove to force Derrington through the identical window from which his mistress had thrown herself. He was killed in the attempt, and Derrington, hotly pursued, made his way to the roof by the turret stair, leapt into the big holly tree, by which—at the cost of some severe scratches—he descended safely to the ground, and escaped. He had to yield

to popular opinion and fly the neighbourhood, but is said to have lived many years afterwards.

"Still, any night after twelve, you may see those two fearful leaps repeated. You see the ghost of the girl, with her hair all flying loose, throw up her arms, and then, with a shriek, spring through the window, while Lord Derrington, with a blood-stained sword in his hand, follows with demoniacal laughter. My story is ended. Sit up who will and judge for themselves."

"Thank you, no, I think we had better look for our candles," exclaimed Agnes.

"Good-night, Charlie; but I don't think you were half pathetic, you never even described Mary Malcolmson," said Laura.

"No, it wasn't worth while," replied Charlie, seriously; "if you go about that gallery much after midnight, you will be able to do that yourself."

"Nonsense, Mr. Repton," cried Mrs. Inglemere. "You don't mean to say you believe in it. Did you ever see it?"

"I would rather not answer that question," said Charlie solemnly. "I am happy to add that my bed-room and the smoking-room are both this side of the gallery, and consequently nothing necessitates my interfering with Lord Derrington or Miss Malcolmson in any way."

Charlie here became so absorbed about the widow's candlestick, that to have continued the subject would have been absurd.

CHAPTER II.

A COUNTRY BALL AND AN APPARITION.

IT was a very snug room that constituted the smoking den at Dunnington, and what an essential to a country house such a snugger is. The old obsolete house, in which one's evening tobacco was only arrived at in the kitchen or servants' hall through the connivance of the butler, has almost disappeared, as also has that race of portly country gentlemen, who vaguely connected indulgence in tobacco with a tendency to immorality, radicalism, and all manner of uncleanness. The soft, mellow light of a well-trimmed lamp, the crackling fire, the broad, lounging sofa, those squab easy chairs so alluring in their embrace, the well-ordered tray at which you temper your soda or seltzer with dry sherry or cognac, according as you think you require stimulant or sedative—all these, combined with a decent Cabana, put one in a soothed state of mind, and fit one to take part in the improving conversation that characterises most smoking-rooms. Well, if not very improving, it is very pleasant, and though we sometimes theorise on the scandal the ladies talk in that half-hour after dinner, I fancy, when we leave the smoking-room, they have not had much the best of us.

Dunnington smoking-room was in full blast.

"When is the Hunt Steeplechase to come off?" inquired Tom Lyttlereck, from the depths of one of the before-mentioned seductive chairs.

"Oh, not for two months yet," replied Charlie; "I wish I had something to put in for it; but I don't think I have got anything fast enough. I should think that beast Beercroft, the wool factor, would win it. He can't ride himself; but that big brown horse of his, The Slasher, he calls it, is a clipper, and he'll easy get some one to ride."

"I tell you what, if you like to give a fair price, I know of a

mare just now in the market that would beat The Slasher, unless he's pounds better than I take him to be."

"Where, and whose?" inquired Charlie, curtly.

"I don't think you know Cis Langton—one of the mysteries of the day—however, Cis is a man who breaks regularly every two or three years; sometimes he has a largish stud, sometimes not even a hack. Now you hear of his winning steeple-chases and lots of money. Now that he has been hit hard, and it's 'all up with Langton.' He disappears, and in a couple of years he'll turn up again with a stud of horses, and everything apparently all right. However, he has had bad times lately, and all his horses are gone to the hammer with the exception of one mare. The reason she has not been parted with yet is, that Cis thinks 'Polly Perkins' uncommonly good. He has won a couple of matches with her, but the only time he ran her in public she came to grief, and was out of the race half way round. Now, you could get that mare cheap, if you would put in the contingency that if he claimed her before the commencement of next hunting season, he might have her back at the same money. He's so sorry to be obliged to sell; I know he'd rather take a shorter price and sell in that way."

"Well, you write about it to-morrow; I'll stand anything in reason sooner than see Beercroft win the Hunt Cup. He's so cock-a-hoop about The Slasher too——"

"I saw Polly Perkins run in the Hunt Chase at Warwick," said Frank Forbes; "she was as good as anything in the race when she fell—full of running."

"Yes, she hadn't a good man up, she's a delicate mouth, and wants rather clever handling; got fretful and over-jumped herself."

"By the way, Repton," said Forbes, "what made you so serious in the wind-up of your ghost story to-night? I should not think you were a believer in 'the night-side of nature.'"

Charlie flipped the ash from his cigar, and took a long pull at some seltzer. "I don't know what you call believing, you've

Scripture for the fact that such things were. I can't say I ever met one, and should be probably in a devil of a funk if I did. My theory all the same being that any spirit or apparition you may see is perfectly powerless to hurt you, further than it does through your nerves and imagination. I certainly don't believe that we can summon spirits from the other world. But allowing for all freaks of imagination, there are several ghost stories in which it is difficult to find a flaw, Lady Tyrconnell's, for instance, is as well authenticated as most history we believe in."

"Very good, Charlie," laughed Tom Lyttlereck. "Your theory about ghosts being powerless to harm us, you of course took from Byron,

"That soul and body on the whole
Are odds against a disembodied soul;"

however, you're perhaps right to stick up for the family phantom."

"You never can be serious for a moment, Tom," interrupted Charlie, when suddenly a distant shriek broke through the muffled door of the smoking-room.

"Good God! what's that? listen," exclaimed Forbes.

Charlie Repton jumped to the door and opened it—shriek after shriek in a woman's voice immediately burst upon their ears.

"Candles, quick. Tom, light a candle. By Jove, here's a row of some kind," and snatching a candle, Charlie rushed down the stairs, followed by his companions.

The shrieks evidently proceeded from the long gallery.

Charlie Repton threw open the door—he and Tom dashed in. On the floor lay the youngest Miss Brereton in strong hysterics, and faintly trying to raise her was Laura Clippington.

"Good heavens! Laura, what is the matter?" exclaimed Charlie.

"Pick her up, please. You must carry her. I think,"

Laura, whose face was very white, and whose lips trembled. "I'll tell you all about it directly, Charlie. It's very foolish, I daresay ; but I'm rather frightened. Poor girl, she's quieter now, and I feel——"

Laura did not finish the sentence, and if Tom Lyttlereck had not caught her, she would have fallen to the ground. However, she did not quite faint, and after drinking some water, came to herself again with a little choking sob, and rather tearful smile.

By this time, people came popping out from all directions, for Fanny Brereton's screams had rung through the house.

What had happened? What was the matter? Nothing. Miss Brereton had been suddenly taken very ill, and unable to get to her room.

Laura's story, when she got a little composed, to Charlie Repton, was this : "Fanny Brereton came to our room for a gossip when we went upstairs. After about three quarters of an hour, she took her candle to go to her own room, the other side of the house. She was full of your ghost story, and said she didn't like crossing the long gallery by herself. After laughing at her a little, I agreed to see her safely across—and we started. I opened the door of the gallery, and a rush of wind blew out our candles ; the door slammed behind us as Fanny gave a slight scream, and then we heard the noise of a rush of wings. Immediately afterwards I saw an awful pair of eyes ; they glared at us for a moment, then Fanny gave that first awful shriek and fell down. Another rush of wings—the eyes glared at me again—a melancholy cry—something white flitted across the far window through the faint moonlight, and then, thank goodness, you came ; for I don't mind admitting, Charlie, I was fairly frightened."

"Well, I can't think what you saw in the gallery ; but being in the dark with that girl in hysterics was enough to frighten you, let alone anything else. You had better go to bed now and leave Tom and me to take a turn round the house."

"Good night then, Charlie : but mind, though I was fright-

ened, I never lost my head, and I really did see and hear all I've told you. Good-night, Mr. Lyttlereck, and thanks for all your care of me," and Laura tripped upstairs. She was quite aware that it was Lyttlereck who had caught her and carried her to a chair when she so nearly fainted.

But though Tom and Charlie Repton made a most rigid examination of the gallery and the rooms adjoining, there was nothing to account for Laura's story.

A country ball, who of us have not revelled in the fun of a country ball? Don't we all know that wonderful jig-a-jig music that recalls Richardson and the by-gone days of Greenwich Fair to our recollection? How they exult in wild dances—the rampant Schottische and stupendous Varsoviana. How the strong-minded young lady of many country balls—it would be cruel to ask how many—is reduced almost to frenzy because you do not remember those dear old obsolete Caledonians, and to this minute, I remember with horror the cold perspiration that came over me, when, having engaged myself for the fifteenth time to a black-eyed young lady in pink, I found it marked down in the programme as 'The Spanish Dance'—how I feebly wondered whether it was the Cachucha, and whether I was supposed to have castanets in my pocket. Then there is the gentleman with weak legs. Still with unabated confidence both in them and his own valseing, though those legs have betrayed him so often. Everyone but himself is quite aware that at least once in the evening they will double up with him like a camp-stool, and a confused heap of muslin and broad-cloth be the consequence. Don't we all know that dreadful sallow-faced young monster, who dances like an india-rubber ball, and with rather less idea of in what direction he may be going—to whom the valse and polka are the same in step and time, and who cannons his way about the room with the most self-satisfied smirk. He is generally articled clerk to the attorney.

All these may be seen at any country ball, and the room at Moretown bore the usual aspect. The country people round mustered in force, and thanks to Charlie Repton's exertions the band was better than usual. The party from Dunnington was strong. Fanny Brereton's nerves had sufficiently recovered, thanks to judicious treatment, though, unless the girls had encountered the unquiet Lord Derrington and his victim, no explanation of their fright could be arrived at. Charlie's mind had been very much troubled with the mystery all day. Tom only laughed, and told him he must be more careful how he played on the imaginations of excitable young ladies in future, and pronounced him to have an undeveloped talent for melodrame.

"Our valse, Miss Laura," said Tom Lyttlereck. "Do you see that extensive head-dress opposite, with the little woman that belongs to it?"

Laura nodded.

"Well, I was so much struck that I made up my mind to ascertain who she is. Imagine my ecstasy, she's a widow."

"I trust you and Charlie won't clash, he's rather a taste that way," and Laura's blue eyes sparkled mischievously.

"I know; but I don't think he'll interfere in this case, one widow's enough at a time for any man to look after. Who and what do you think she is?"

"Oh, dear, I'm sure I can't say. Quite a new specimen of the genus."

"Don't be severe. My heart's gone. Her name is Simpson, and, as I am informed, she comes of a genteel grazing family, though whether the late lamented Simpson left her mistress of many flocks and herds I know not as yet."

"Give me an opening, Tom," said Charlie, who with Mrs. Inglemere was valseing just behind them. "We are on an errand of vengeance," and Charlie passed them best pace, and taking advantage of the next corner cannoned the *bête noir* of the room dexterously amongst the bystanders, as some slight

satisfaction for his partner's torn dress and his own trodden on toes.

Supper is over, the room thins a little, and the real valsers settle steadily down to their work. Charlie Repton has laid violent hands on the orchestra; 'eccentrics' are struck out and the steady valse, gallop, quadrille substituted in the programme. Popular clamour is rising, however, murmurs are heard at the suppression of the last schottische, plaintive hopes are expressed in favour of the much loved Caledonians, and at their merciless excision the towns-folk stand at bay and send forth a hoarse cry for 'Sir Roger.'

"It's all over," said Charlie, "we must yield to the democracy. *Vox populi* is triumphant. Come along, Minnie, and give them a lead in Sir Roger."

"Of course, it's great fun, I like Sir Roger, though there is such grief amongst our dresses. Only we can't expect Mrs. Repton to see it out."

"Heaven forbid!" said Charlie, "I've known it last an hour."

Down the middle, the whole room is soon lost in all the fun and racket of Sir Roger. Skirts suffer awfully, flounces and ribbons begin to strew the floor. Frank Forbes introduces a step or two from the 'Dusty Bob' hornpipe, which thrills the breasts of the natives with admiration. The weak-legged young man of course doubles up, and collapses in the centre of a 'down the middle' best pace, nearly producing the effects of a railway accident. What steps, incited by Laura Clippington, Frank Forbes might have next displayed, we can't guess. But Mrs. Repton is signalling violently—the Blue Peter is decidedly flying—opera cloaks and carriages are loudly inquired for, and the Dunnington party are soon on their homeward way.

It was the custom at Dunnington, and a highly to be commended custom it was, upon returning from these dancing campaigns, to muster for a supplementary supper in the dining-room, at which entertainment, hot soup and sherry formed a pleasing and prominent feature. Here, as usual, our party are now assembled.

"Now, then, Laura, I'm sure you must be quite ready for soup and scandal," said Charlie, seizing the soup-ladle. "Mrs. Inglemere, let me send you some."

"Mr. Forbes, I'm sure you're quite qualified to join the Christy Minstrels after your performance to-night in Sir Roger," said the widow.

"Charlie, can't you help Mr. Lyttlereck?" exclaimed Laura. "He's lost his heart to a widow in 'the grazing way;' won't you be his best man and let's have a pastoral wedding as soon as the weather is warm enough?"

"Certainly. Tom, command me."

"Well, Miss Laura, I don't know that the arrangements for my wedding are quite at your disposal. When they are, I hope you'll display equal powers of administration," said Tom, quietly, and there was something in his tone and the glance that accompanied it that caused a flush of the young lady's cheek, and a rapid turn of the conversation.

"Well," said Agnes, "I think I must ask for a candlestick. Thanks. Any one else ready for bed?"

The move became general. At the top of the stairs those living the further side of the long gallery stopped to say "good night." Suddenly, two wild, mournful cries were heard, evidently proceeding from the gallery.

"Shade of the Derringtons," exclaimed Tom, as he opened the door, "your voice is not melodious."

Again was heard the rush of wings; again gleamed the awful eyes; but the rapid advance of half-a-dozen candles soon gave a palpable reality to the white spectre that flitted shrieking away from them.

What is it? It's a bat! Too big a deal. It's a bird. An owl, by Jove! and what a big one! And driven back by the candles, there in the far corner of the gallery crouched a huge white owl, sorely dismayed, and blinking hideously.

"You wretch!" said Laura, shaking her finger at the captive. "How you did frighten me last night."

"Yes," said Charlie, "I shall give orders for his execution. Personating the ghost of my ancestor is gross disrespect to the family. I wonder where he got to last night?"

"Ah! I don't quite know how we missed him," said Tom. "Stop—of course—how stupid of us. Don't you remember the door at this end of the gallery was open? Of course, he retreated that way."

Minnie and Laura Clippington were completing their toilette for the night. They had been chatting over the events of the evening.

"By the way," said Minnie, "you and Mr. Lyttlereck seem to get on uncommonly well together. I think he's a little smitten with you, sister mine. How long it took you to say 'Good night.'"

"Nonsense, Minnie; it was Charlie and Mrs. Inglemere caused all that stop on the stairs. However, Mr. Lyttlereck is very nice, and what's more, he's—"

"Well, what?" inquired Minnie, "he's what?"

Laura looked round at her sister, her blue eyes dancing with fun; then suddenly dropping them, said demurely, "hooked, my dear."

"Why, you don't mean to say—"

"No, I don't mean to say," laughed Laura. "Don't be foolish, Minnie, go to sleep."

CHAPTER III.

A MATCH, LIKEWISE A CATCH.

It was a bright December morning, and the fleecy clouds floated high in the clear grey sky. The sun shone cheerily down on the barrack square of the little town of Milton, one of those pleasant country quarters which are now numbered among the bright memories of the British Army.

I am writing of those halcyon days before the Crimean war ; when competitive examinations and Enfield rifles still lay unconceived in the womb of Time ; before 'camps' and 'the musketry course' had set their inexorable grip upon our officers ; when an hour's drill after morning parade was the regular routine, and field days merely an occasional whim on the part of commanding officer or general. Of course, we were all woefully ignorant in those days in every profession. The march of intellect yet slumbered ; metaphysics were not supposed to bear much on the correct commanding of a company, or geology deemed an essential in the Civil Service. The Indian people got on without a good deal of knowledge that is now deemed necessary in their vocation. I suppose it was all wrong, and certainly with regard to the army, the Crimean war seemed to show that it could not be all right. Our people fought as well as ever when they were there ; but the science of getting them there, and of keeping them alive when they were there, seemed to have grown a little rusty. However, they were pleasant those old days in the army. If we hadn't much science, pluck pulled us through the small rows in the Colonies, and as for a European struggle, that was supposed to have all ended at Waterloo. Did not Manchester sing the Millennium, perpetual peace, perpetual cotton, and dry goods *viz.* When the struggle did come, the fine old system undoubtedly rather fell through. When the next comes, science will have, perhaps, supplied artillery and musketry with a noiseless and smokeless explosive agent, which will make a battle as quiet and scientific as a veritable game of chess.

Well, in those days, Milton was as pleasant a station as a man need be quartered in. The —th was the only regiment within miles. The people all round were hospitable as Arabs, and if a man only took things as they came, and was ready to take part in whatever was going on, there were plenty of houses to which you were always welcome. In short, as Jack Travers was wont to say, "You should have a portmanteau always

packed, and an application for three days' leave constantly in the order-room."

The parade is dismissed, and the officers congregate in the mess-room, the late men for breakfast—others to chat over what should be selected for the afternoon's diversion.

Lounging with his back to the fire, stands Jack Travers, a tall, good-looking fellow of some five or six-and-twenty, and as popular a 'sub' as there is in the Army List. His sanguine, cheery, genial temperament and bright smile are not to be denied. Testiest of old gentlemen, most acidulated of old ladies melt beneath the *abandon* of Jack's manner. Nothing can damp him; nothing disturb his imperturbable good temper. Scrapes he is in everlastingly, and glides out of them with a facility all his own. The principal bane of his existence is, his extraordinary weakness for what in his vernacular he describes as 'good things.' From the orchard-robbing days of his youth, when he was invariably the scapegoat, until now, he had pursued the phantom with a confidence nothing seemed to daunt. His ardent following up of 'good things' on Newmarket Heath when at Cambridge, early procured for him an intimation that his further residence at the University was likely to prove neither profitable to himself nor creditable to his college. Jack took the hint, looking upon it much in the light of another 'good thing,' and entered the army. Here 'good things' fell upon him with such rapidity in the shape of 'dark ones' for the Leger, 'morals' in the fights, and other certainties, that Jack, whose little money was at his own disposal, found himself at the end of two years insolvent past redemption. Fortunately for him, at this crisis, a vinegary old aunt who had quarrelled with all her nephews and nieces, but had never seen Jack, happened to die. Disliking those she had seen more than the nephew she had not, she left him some five thousand pounds; but having had him invariably dinned into her ears as a most irreclaimable scapegrace, put him in for the only really 'good thing' ever done for him, by tying it up so tightly

that Jack was unable to get at the principal. Since which, though sanguine as ever, he had been compelled to prosecute his 'good things' on a very limited scale.

Seated at the table at breakfast, is another man who deserves notice, more especially as he is destined to play a considerable part in this history. He is a slight, sallow, dark man, verging on forty, and already shows a thread or two of silver in his black hair. At the first glance you would call him a handsome man; but almost immediately you become conscious of something sinister in his face. Regular, clean-cut features, thin, passionless lips, rather tight drawn over white and regular teeth; very dark, keen, bright eyes, with strongly marked brows; there you see the defect of the face, the eyes are placed rather too near together. Captain Delpré, for such is his name, is an habitually reserved and rather silent man. A capital rider, and a very good whist and *écarté* player, he exchanged into the regiment some five years back, and of his antecedents his brother officers know little. He is not given to talk much of his early days or family. He began soldiering, they know, in the Guards, but shortly exchanged from them to a regiment in India, from whence he came to the —th. Some rumours there were that he had done queer things in the East, and that his exchange was more a matter of necessity than choice. But there were not as many men passing to and fro between the two countries in those days as now, and nothing tangible was ever alleged against Delpré. He was not popular in the corps, and devoted himself principally to racing and hunting.

"Well, what's everybody going to do to-day?" inquired Travers. "Herries, are you for a rubber of rackets? If so, I'm your man."

"I don't mind for an hour or so; but what time is this pounding match to come off, Delpré?"

"Oh, I don't know; about three, I suppose, eh, Rolls?"

"Three 'll do stunning," said Travers, "and we can all come out and see it. Suit you, Crumbs, won't it?"

The individual thus addressed was a good-looking boy about nineteen, his real patronymic was Rolls ; but being small, slight, and youthful, the mild pleasantry of the mess-table had christened him 'Crumbs.'

"Oh, yes, three will do very well for me. I don't know whether Dalpré will think that's leaving him sufficient daylight to pound the old horse in though," laughed young Rolls.

"Let's see, what is the match exactly?" inquired Travers, "for I wasn't in the room when it was made."

"Herries there has got the agreement. It's all down in black and white," replied Delpré ; "he'll show it you."

"Well," said Herries, "there was no holding Crumbs last night about the brown horse. He was going to back him to go through or over canals, houses, anything you please. So Delpré at last offered to bet him a tenner, that that grey horse of his, that won the Calfbrigg Steeple-chase, jumped something without fall or blunder that the brown couldn't. To come off this afternoon, owners up—"

"You will have your work cut out, Delpré, 'the brown' is as clever a fencer as ever I saw. I should rather back him to put the grey down that he pounded himself," observed Travers.

"What a pity you won't study the conditions of the match before you talk about it," sneered Delpré, "if you did, you wouldn't talk such bosh about 'putting down' and 'pounding.' You don't suppose I am going to back my nerve against Crumbs's, who, at his age, doesn't know what nerves are. When he has been as near breaking his neck as I have, he'll ride with a deal less pluck and a deal more judgment. If you'll just read the paper Herries has got, you will see that I back 'the Dancing Master' to jump clean over, without fall or blunder, something Rolls's brown horse doesn't. If he follows me clean over everything, I lose, Herries to be judge."

"Any time mentioned?" inquired Travers, "or you may continue giving leads indefinitely."

"No, by the way, I don't think any limit was put to the time.

Put in one hour from jumping the first fence, Herries. It's merely I don't think that brown horse quite so clever as his owner and some more of you do. An hour will convince either him or me."

"Well, I shall dress for rackets; come along, Herries. When do you throw off, Delpré?"

"I don't know—let's see—we'll say the Link fields at a quarter to three sharp, the days are so short now. Rolls, too, seems to think that I shall want a liberal allowance of daylight to show whether I'm right in my opinion of the brown horse."

"A quarter to three, and Rolls wins for ten. Will you have it, Delpré?"

"Thank you, no, 'the Dancing Master' is not always a perfect lady's horse across country, and if he misbehaves it will be very soon over."

A quarter to three saw a strong regimental muster in the Link fields, to say nothing of a sprinkling of sporting characters from Milton, for the match had oozed out and excited no little interest in the town. It does not take much to excite interest in a small country town—a very little causes a commotion in the stagnant waters of its existence. Everybody knows everybody else's affairs with such accuracy, that they are no more a novelty than they are to their legitimate proprietors. New residents are a perfect treat. So much to find out about them; but the arrival of new residents is far from an everyday occurrence in country towns. Well, it all comes to much the same thing; no need to talk about a circumscribed existence and of the petty feelings and petty interests of Little Pedlington. The interests of the world our lot has cast us in always become speedily identified with our own. What do we care about the attitude of France at this critical juncture, when the question is—will the Smiths meet the Thompsons at our hospitable board on Tuesday next? What's the lavish expenditure of the South Eastern Railway to us, compared with the ostentation of the Joneses in starting that bottle-green imp-

powdered over with buttons? The moral of all which is that we had better be content with the pleasures within our reach instead of sighing for the unattainable. Do as the sporting community of Milton did, turn out to look at a good 'pounding' match, in default of an opportunity of seeing the Liverpool.

Much discussion was going on about the probable result. Both men were well known with the hounds, so was the 'brown horse.' Of 'the Dancing Master' they had not seen much. He had been out a few times, but obviously only to qualify for Hunt Steeple-chases, and except when he won at Calfrigg, nobody had ever seen him really go. Still the opinion of the *cognoscenti* was that he was a hot-headed horse, and much more likely to come to grief than 'the brown,' who as they all said would both jump and crawl, and had always a leg to spare. Of the particular terms of the match it is needless to say they were in ignorance.

The two horses were a great contrast. Rolls rode his 'brown' on to the ground, a hunter of the old stamp, short legged, grand quarters, plain head, and a slightly Roman nose—a little lacking quality, and evidently not a speedy one. Delpré rode down on a hack, leaving his groom to take charge of 'the Dancing Master.' He was a grand horse to look at, and in almost racing condition. A great slashing grey about sixteen hands, deep girthed, splendid fore hand, and with his thighs let down in a way that denotes galloping. His small clean head, well set on, certifies to his being nearly thorough-bred, if not quite. A rather wicked-looking eye gives the idea of having a will of his own. At present he is fretting a good deal, and requires the entire attention of the groom upon him to keep him within bounds, while he testifies to the justice of his sobriquet by a good deal of valsing on his hind legs.

The Link field is a large open common of some hundred acres or so, traversed by an unfenced road. On the north it is bounded by the river, on the other sides principally by grass

enclosures with very moderate fences. Here the 'cricket matches, foot-ball matches, &c., of Milton take place, and an occasional spin on 'the flat' is run round it. For Milton does not aspire to the dignity of races of its own, though it occasionally gets up two or three matches for an afternoon's sport.

"Bring him up, Tom, and let the stirrups down a hole," said Delpré, and in another minute he was on the back of 'the Dancing Master.'

"Ready to start?" inquired Herries.

"No," replied Delpré, as the grey acknowledged his master with a couple of plunges and a buck jump. "Rolls need have no fear of my giving him a lead in the dark; but I must give this devil a short gallop first, just to steady him a bit," and bending easily forward in his saddle, he sent the grey down the Link.

"He's a grand goer, certainly," said Jack Travers, as he watched the grey striding along with the easy swing of a thorough-bred, though tearing savagely at his bit all the time.

Delpré's hand seemed motionless and as rigid as a vice, and "he'll be bad to beat at Nantyghlo, if you run him, Captain," saluted his ears, as he rattled him home the last quarter of a mile a burster.

Turning his horse quietly round, Delpré led the way down to the fence leading out of the common on the south side, a small hedge and ditch.

"Now, Herries," he exclaimed, "I'm ready. Travers, 'the Dancing Master' don't go very kind, but I think he can polish off that brown cart-horse; you can have that tenner, if you like."

"It's a bet," quoth Jack, sententiously.

"I'll go you another tenner, Captain Delpré," interposed the sporting doctor.

"Thank you, no—that'll do to begin with. Ready, Rolls? then come along," and Delpré turned the grey at the fence.

'The Dancing Master' went at it open-mouthed, as if he

meant to be well into the middle of the next field, and it seemed a hundred and fifty yards before his rider fairly got hold of him again. Crumbs on 'the brown' topped over like a bird, and leisurely followed his leader over two or three small fences, the grey rather rushing, the brown going cleverly, and quietly—then Delpré led back into the Links field again, and pulled up.

"Why, you've not done yet?" exclaimed Herries.

"No, not *quite*, yet," was the reply, "but this brute pulls so. Rolls, you've got it in comfort, whatever may be the result. I'll take six to four I win yet. Thirty to twenty, who'll lay it?"

"Dash it all, the brown's bound to beat that tearing devil," said the sporting doctor. "I'll go you half of it, Captain."

"You're on, sir. Won't anyone have the remainder?" The residue was snapped at once.

"Confound it!" ejaculated Jack Travers, as Delpré walked his horse a little away. "It's the best thing out. I'll just offer him sixty to forty, once."

"Don't be a fool, Jack," said Herries. "What Delpré's dodge is, I don't know; but you'll lose your tenner, certain. I never saw his eye glitter like that, and that pleasant grin on his countenance, but that somebody was not a little the poorer before long; you ought to know, he's 'had you' often enough, I'm sure."

Once more Delpré led off the Links over a few small fences, and back again as before. Rolls following him easily, of course. No bets were offered this time, an uneasy feeling had got about that the whole thing was 'a do.' To the astonishment of all, Delpré this time walked his horse towards the river. Pausing as they crossed the road mentioned as crossing the common from end to end, he exclaimed:

"Now, Herries, take your stand here, you'll see as well here as anywhere. I mean business this time, and either win or lose my money."

Followed by Rolls, he then went on towards the river—the

spectators remaining grouped at the *road*. Turning at the river bank, he immediately set his horse going, and bringing him up at racing pace, the grey flew the roadway, some sixteen feet from grass to grass, in his stride. The whole thing was at once transparent—the brown, of course, in spite of a taste of the spur, galloped across it.

Shy looks and murmurs met Delpré as he rode up to Herries and asked if he had won ; but little cared the Captain for that. It was not the first time that he found himself anything but the idol of a race course. Herries gravely admitted that according to the wording of the agreement he was the winner, supplementing his decision with the observation that it was hardly in the spirit of it, he thought.

The Doctor was more outspoken, and said that had he had any idea of that sort of thing, he should never have bet. That he had come out to see a sporting match and not a regular catch, and muttered something about referring his bet to higher authority before he paid it.

A good many others followed suit in the same strain.

Delpré's speech on the occasion was worthy of a better cause.

"Gentlemen," he said, "in the course of my life, I have noticed that nothing varies more than the different views people take of a bet. It's one of my rules, consequently, to have all such transactions clearly defined in black and white. I had it so in this case, and Captain Herries tells you that I have won. Had you been on my side you would have chuckled, being on the other, you cry out. It's human nature, the biters grin, and the bitten whine. If people assent to black and white agreements without understanding them, I really can't help it. I never found anyone sympathise with me when I forgot to carry a penalty, and (here he smiled) I have had to put up a good many in my time."

"But," interposed the Doctor, "I thought it was a pound-matching match? I did not understand——"

"Of course not, Doctor, and what a lot of people there are

in this world who *do* bet upon things they don't understand. What would become of 'the ring' without them? You'll have laid out your money well to-day, if it makes you resolve in future always clearly to ascertain what you are going to bet about. I should recommend you all also not to be in too great a hurry to back 'the Dancing Master' for Nantyghlo. In racing matters, the public often pay for trying to pick out the winner a little bit before the proper time. Good morning, gentlemen," and Delpré cantered leisurely from the ground.

"Confound it! Travers," said little Rolls, ruefully, "what an infamous do! I knew he couldn't pound my old horse."

"No, Crumbs; but he's got your money without it, which I daresay, he deems quite as satisfactory. Sharp practice, very! By Jove, Herries, I may thank you for saving me a good many sovereigns."

Considerable discussion took place about the event of the afternoon that evening at mess, at which Delpré happened not to be present.

"'To be jumped clean, without a fall or blunder,' so says the bond; there is no getting out of it, Crumbs; he did jump it, and you did not. As for the words 'without fall or blunder,' they are mere moonshine, and just put in to blind us. It seems the grey always jumped that road whenever they galloped him there."

That was Herries' concluding remark of a somewhat lengthy discussion of the subject.

"Come and smoke a cigar in my room, Herries," said Jack Travers, "while I pack up my traps. I am off to town to-night by the mail train." And the pair left the mess-room for Travers' quarters.

Having ensconced Herries in an easy chair, and provided him with a huge regalia, Jack commenced his preparations for the road. First, making the passages re-echo with the name of Nixon (why don't they ever put bells in barracks), he emptied the contents of a chest of drawers on to the floor, and select-

ing such articles from the heap as he required, threw them to his servant to put up, accompanying the process by a running commentary on his wardrobe.

"Extraordinary the way everything you don't want comes to hand on these occasions. Flannel trousers, useful things in December. Where are the dress shirts? not that, you muff, with the frill on: that was made to play an old man in, at the Ryalston theatricals. Racket shoes—sure to want them in the country, of course. Which knickerbockers? Why, you idiot! those are the trunk hose I wore in my Charles II. dress at the fancy ball. There's a useful thing, Herries, blue frock coat! Money 'clean thrown away. Had to buy that to 'make up' for best man at a wedding. (Jack is a little theatrical in his tastes.) I wonder why washerwomen never will by any accident fold one's white ties twice of the same breadth? Smoking jacket? yes, put it in. Cab come? all right. Take the traps down. Well, Herries, good-bye, old man, drop us a line to the old shop, and let's know how you are carrying on here. I wonder how many of the necessaries of daily life that villain Nixon has omitted to put up? He's as big a fool as ever packed a portmanteau," and Jack dashed down the stairs and jumped into the cab.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN GREEK MET GREEK, THEN WAS THE TUG OF WAR.

I WONDER if there is a time men feel sadder than they do over a solitary evening pipe, preceded by a dull day in which they have had nothing to do and have been left pretty much to themselves. How the mistakes of our life rise up before the mind's eye, and throw a melancholy gloom over the unravelled future; our sins of omission and commission crop up before us with a magnified intensity that is bad to look at. We muse

on the dreams of our early youth and think sadly how little we have realized them. As Kingsley sings,

“ When all the world is young, lad,
When all the trees are green,
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen;
Then hey for boot and horse, lad,
And round the world away;
Young blood must have its ecourse, lad,
And every dog his day.”

All that time is gone, the trees are not all green to us now, and the lasses are not all queens. We know the geese from the swans, and if we have had our day, are fain to confess that we have done very little in it.

Well, we think had we to live it all over again, how different it should be, and yet I question very much whether we should do much better. We are all penitent, when our sins, like the chickens, come home to roost. We glance sadly at those of our contemporaries who have passed us in the race, and lay the flattering unction to our souls that we never had their chances. Shallow fools, as if man did not make opportunities, or as if the time did not always come to those who honestly strove and patiently waited.

It is no use, my dear friend, you cannot pick up the dropped stitches. You cannot recover the lost time. The time spent and the neglected opportunity do not return. It is no use meditating on when ‘the tide in your affairs’ took place, or where it led. You did not take it at the turn, and had best make up your mind to keeping your head honestly above water for the future. Put down the pipe, and pray God help you to do better in the coming time, and when ‘the wheels run down,’ you

“ Creep home and take your place there,
The spent and maimed among;
God grant you find one face there
You loved when all was young.”

I cannot say these were quite the reflections that ran through

Delpré's mind as he sat smoking a solitary cigar in his own room. Kingsley's lines certainly would not occur to him, for he had no more poetry in him than an oyster. I don't mean that he confined his readings entirely to *Bell's Life* and the *Racing Calendar* after the manner of men of his type. He had been originally meant for better things; but the demon of play had seized him for his own, and poetry and sentiment had died out of him. Biting articles in the *Saturday Review* on our social difficulties were more in his line, and to a certain extent he read to talk. Never touching upon past reminiscences, there was an abnegation of self in his conversation pleasant from its rarity. He was generally well up in all the current topics of the day, and with men mostly got on well. Intimate he never was with anyone. Women, with their finer instinct, shrunk from him, they mistrusted him intuitively, and disliked and feared his bold sneering manner. It had not been always so, but fifteen years of a gambler's life had left him callous to everything but self-interest, and cynical in the extreme upon all points of honour and fine feeling. He had not dined at mess as before said on the night of the match, not that he in the slightest degree feared any allusion to his sharp practice. To do him justice his contempt for public opinion was unlimited. Self-reliant in the extreme, he could trust to his cool head and bitter tongue to control that sufficiently for his purpose, and was far too selfish to trouble his head about the likes and dislikes of those among whom he might be thrown.

He had dined in his own room, and as he sat smoking, was going through the process above described. Shadows of the past life so misspent alternate with the grim skeletons of the present, and as the smoke wreathed round his head his thoughts seemed none of the pleasantest. More than once did he rise from his chair and pace the room. Again and again did he glance over a heap of letters that lay on the table near at hand.

"Confound it," he muttered, "the luck seems against me all round. I can't see my way out of it at all; that hound, Davidson, too, turning up just at this moment, looks awkward. Sharp practice they call it, picking up that fifty to-day. Gad, if I saw my way to five hundred, I think they'd say then I don't stick at trifles."

He paused in his walk up and down the room, and stood for a moment staring into the fire and sucking hard at his cigar. Then again glanced over some letters. "'Beg to call your attention to your bill of three-fifty due on the 23rd proximo.' Pleasant, and I haven't one to meet it with. Hum, here's another.

"'DEAR DELPRÉ,

"'You, of course, have seen, ere this, Kingfisher won 'the open' at Roxby; consequently I win your four fifties. Please pay to my account at Smithson and Cook's. Sorry to say I had a baddish meeting.

"'Yours,

"'CONINGSBY CLARKE.'

"Yes, you are quite right; I did see it. One don't overlook those sort of things in the papers. H—m, Sadler's account. Doublesoles; hah! a stiff one from Welt and Overlay, both in style and amount. These can wait;" and he threw them carelessly on the table. "Well, it's no use cursing one's luck. Let's look the thing straight in the face, and see what I must face at once. There's Clarke's two hundred, and the bill of three-fifty. Yes; five hundred would stop the gap for the present, if—ah! there it is. It's no use, I can't settle what's to be done till I have seen Davidson."

He threw himself into the arm-chair, and fell into a reverie. His thoughts wandered back to his early start in the Guards. How different he was then; how he plunged with all the delight of a boy into the sweets of a London life. Then came

that infernal scrape down at Tenby. He behaved thundering bad there he knew. Whether he had put himself within the reach of the law or not, he was doubtful at the time; but society would have gibbeted him without mercy had it transpired.

Then came the long voyage to India, and he thought of another fair face that looked fondly up into his, as they lingered late on the poop during those gorgeous tropic nights, and watched the Southern Cross rise high in the heavens. His lip curled as he thought how he had redeemed the vows then made; of passionate letters unanswered, and of the last dignified womanly letter in which she bade him farewell; one sentence, how well he remembered it, though it was many years since he received and destroyed that letter. "Twas left for you—God forgive you for it—to teach me how men could lie!" Yes, she played in earnest, he *pour passer le temps*. Then he thought of his life in India; how he loathed the monotony at first. He could see now the old cantonment; he could picture to himself well the little club-house in which he imbibed the rudiments of play; how he glided by imperceptible degrees from the mild rubber to heavy points; how a little *écarté* to wind up with soon became a regular occurrence. Then he recollected how blind hookey and loo superseded first the *écarté* and then the whist. He thought of how they settled down to unlimited loo night after night; he could see the club-room now, two or three native sheroffs sitting, their bags full of rupees and their inkstands ready, waiting to furnish the money to take up the I.O.U.s with, at the finish of the play, and to draw out those bills bearing such unconscionable interest for the signature of the losers. One night in particular he recollected, how high and reckless ran the play there. It was the last night that coterie met. The next morning young Fitzpatrick of the Artillery, was lying on the floor of his bungalow with shattered skull and a discharged pistol beside him. Scandal had whispered for some time of the proceedings at the club.

house, she ran riot now. Lost more than he could ever pay, poor fellow—three thousand rupees, a lac, two lacs. Foul play was rumoured ; an inquiry ordered ; but the five or six actors in the drama kept their own counsel pretty much, and beyond what the dead man's ' paper ' in the hands of the sheroffs told, little oozed out. He, poor fellow, had cut the knot of his difficulties, and slept soundly in the cemetery.

Again the scene changes ; he has left the plains, and is on leave up at the Neilgherries. Flirtation, play and scandal are the leading diversions of that wicked sanatorium. Once more the gaming-table woos him to its embraces. There is horse-racing, too, and into both phases of gambling he plunges wildly. What a row there is about that handsome Arab of Charlton's, first favourite for the Gold Cup. How they talked when he came out dead lame, and hinted he'd been got at. What a lot of rupees he made out of that business. Then came that row at the Club. What fools fellows are to lose their temper. The absurdity of recrimination. If they had but kept quiet and held their tongues, what could they have made of all that *écarté* business with young Stanfield. That fool, Davidson, he would drink. As if men who played ever ought to touch "Simpkins," more especially when they are engaged in such ticklish games as we were playing then. "It was devilish awkward," he muttered, "and a great bore. I was rather *épris*, too, with that pretty Mrs. Simmonds. What an old beast her husband was. Well, it finished Davidson, and by Jove it was the closest shave ever I had—just pulled through by the skin of my teeth. Had to clear out and go back to the regiment, and some of them looked shy. They had got an inkling of the story, evidently. Yes, 'leave home' was the best thing I could have done. Then it would never have done to face India again ; that country was more morally hot for me than physically ; and now, just as things are at their blackest, I get this note from Davidson. Lost sight of him for years, and trusted he was hung or transported by this.

“DEAR DELPRÉ,

“I *must* see you. You remember the Neilgherries. I don't want to rake up old stories. If *you don't*, you'll say when and where. It may be unpleasant for you if you're not at home somewhere shortly.

“I am,

“Sincerely yours,

“R. DAVIDSON.”

“Would it have been a bolder game to tear it up and ignore it?” and Delpré glanced at the dirty little note he held in his hand. “I believe it would; and yet he could say too much. Still, he's a broken man. However, it's too late now, and circumstances must guide me during our interview.” Once more the smoke rolled in heavy clouds round his head, and again he stared vacantly at the fire.

A knock at the door, and his servant entered.

“Person to see you, sir.”

Delpré's servant was accustomed to introduce all manner of men to his master's presence—racing touts, betting men, country reporters, pedestrians out of luck, &c.—so that the new-comer elicited but a passing glance as he ushered him into the room. He was a tall, gaunt, cadaverous-looking man, with extremely short sandy hair, and not a vestige of whisker, moustache, or even eyebrow. A pair of cold blue eyes, that generally seemed looking into infinite space, never at anything or anybody, and yet, as further acquaintance would show, took in everything at a glance. His dress was of the shabby genteel order, both hat and boots showing unmistakable signs of having seen their best days.

The man bowed obsequiously; but no sooner had the servant disappeared than he threw himself down in an easy-chair, nodded benignly, and then observed,

“How do, Del?”

Delpré had to a certain extent marked out his game. Perfectly unruffled he shook hands with his visitor.

"Well, Davidson, glad to see you again, it's years since we met, and I'm afraid the world has gone hard with you. What will you take? there's brandy, cold water, and soda on the table, or that kettle will boil if you put it on the fire for a minute. Pipe or cigar? make yourself comfortable, and then I'll hear what you want to see me about."

A grim smile overspread the other's countenance as he listened to this little exordium. He coolly filled himself out a stiff glass of brandy and water, produced a short black clay pipe and filled it, then turning as he stood on the hearth-rug, he said:—

"Like you, Delpré, all over. You begin with a thundering lie, saying you are glad to see me. You think the world's been using me hard since you saw me, do you? Well, picking oakum in Pentonville ain't quite the reward a grateful public should bestow on one's services. You're about right, I've had roughish times since I was fast Dick Davidson of the —th, and the boldest player at the Neilgherry Club. I played pretty well on the square till I met you. You taught me a thing or two; I fancy now it's my turn to become school-master."

"Glad to hear you acknowledge old benefits, Dick," replied Delpré, "I found you untrained amongst the game cocks, and taught you to use your spurs."

"You did for your own purposes," hotly responded the other, "and a pretty finish I made of it. However, I'm not going to blame you altogether for that, though you served us all pretty much the same as the monkey did the cat when he wanted the hot chestnuts, and no monkey or man ever went for hotter chestnuts than you did, Del."

"Curse 'the salad days' in which I played with confederates," muttered Delpré. "However, you hardly came here to talk over young Stanfield's *écarté* business; the thing is dead, gone and buried, and the raking it up would neither much profit you or me."

"Certainly not you, as for me it would matter devilish little

what they raked up about me. When Z 22 steps into the box at Bow Street and says 'convicted of obtaining money under false pretences, your worship, in June, '50,' I don't think 'broke by court-martial for swindling at cards' will be of much account afterwards."

Delpré smoked silently. Losing your temper is losing your game, was one of his axioms. What did this man want? money of course; but to what extent? He was a convicted felon; attempts to extort money were dealt with pretty stiffly. How much really was he in this man's power, he didn't know. The event must show.

Davidson first broke silence.

"You are right, I didn't come here or urgently want to see you to talk over old times. It may be all very jolly for old friends at 'the Rag,' who've not come to grief; but conversation, except on the part of the chaplain, is a little restricted at Pentonville. I've not been moving much in the higher circles lately," here he grinned, "nor do I suppose you yet want a lesson in thieves' patter. You will some day. I have come to see you because I want what all the world wants—money. I come to you because I don't see anywhere else I can get it so easy."

"I thought as much, in fact what else could you want? Your personal appearance would hardly justify the belief that you want me to join you in starting a Bank Company (limited) or anything of that."

"Stop your chaff," interrupted Davidson savagely, "I want money and mean to have it. You have only to consider one thing, how to get it. It was a lucky fluke for me happening to see that grey horse passing through the town yesterday morning. He caught my eye, for I know a galloper when I see him yet, Del. Heard he was yours, says I that's an old pal, I'm about stumped, he's the man to set me afloat again. For I know of old you're not the man to leave an old pal in the mire."

Here the ruffian leered pleasantly at Delpré.

"You're quite right, Davidson, I am not the man to leave an old friend in the mud if I can help him out of it. Let's come to the point at once. What do you want, to give you another start? If ten pounds is any use to you, you shall have it."

"Ten pounds, ho, ho! ten pounds! Liberality never was one of your vices. You used to have a pretty good head for reckoning up the weaknesses of your fellow creatures; in the old days few men knew the worth of information better. Do you think all your teaching was lost on me? that I have so utterly forgotten the science of putting the screw on, as all that comes to? Do you think I have forgotten your masterly stroke about the Collector of Buntoor, how you pool-pooled me when I wanted to accept his compromise, and said if we stood out he'd pay all rather than face exposure. You were right, he did, Del. Do you think that I did not treasure up the dogmas that fell from your lips? Are you fool enough to think after what I have told you of my life since, that I have become more innocent? Do you think I am jesting? Have you reckoned as I have what exposure will cost you? Do you think for one instant, that any weakness for old days, when we lived together, will shut my mouth against the furtherance of my own interests? By heaven, it never was any weakness of yours! You've turned driveller of late. The English turf must find you far easier to deal with than they did in India. Speak common sense, man, ten tenners are not going to buy me."

And he gave a hoarse laugh, and mixed himself some more brandy-and-water.

"Very good, Davidson," replied Delpré. "I have heard your little rhapsody out, now mark me. You will not find me, I think, turned driveller, nor that I have quite lost the head you so flatteringly gave me credit for. As an old acquaintance I should have given you your ten pounds in your difficulties. Now I won't give you one shilling unless you submit to my terms."

"Terms, I like that," broke in the other. "I told you it was

my turn to be schoolmaster now—terms indeed—I have come here to dictate my terms, and you had better give in to them at once without more palavering.”

“I should have thought,” interposed Delpré, in his most sneering accents, “our former acquaintance might have taught you better than to measure yourself against me. Fool,” he continued, in his most contemptuous tones, “what brought your fate upon you? you know better than I can tell you. You drank like an idiot, babbled like a baby, and lost your temper like a girl in her teens. We won’t talk about that. You paid for your folly and nearly made me. As you didn’t quite, I’ve nothing more to say on that score.”

“Never mind raking up the story of the smash. I was a fool in those days, and, as you say, paid for it. I intend you to pay for it now. I stood to you well at all events. I think I see your face now when the judge advocate put the question—

“‘Has any communication directly or indirectly taken place between you and Captain Delpré since your arrest, Mr. Davidson?’ and I answered ‘No,’ perjuring myself as you had done half an hour before previously. Your lips twitched a little then, my boy, as I hesitated. It was all up with me through my own folly, I’ll admit; but I saved you. Now I am going to be paid for my services.”

“You had better have let me finish at once,” and Delpré paused to knock the ashes off his cigar. “If,” he continued, in measured tones, “a police officer can find you in Milton tomorrow by one o’clock, I shall give you in charge for pursuing your old vocation, attempting to obtain money under false pretences.”

“Do it!” cried the other, springing to his feet. “You won’t find me shrink from it. Exposure has no terrors for me. I fancy the false pretences will hardly hold water. A magistrate will think I have some grounds for asking assistance from you when he hears the story.”

"Hold! Your evidence to begin upon is worthless, as you must first admit the previous perjury. The law in England does not allow people to swear that black's white one day, and white's black the next. There's such a thing as indictment for perjury, as your Pentonville friends might have informed you. Your story, I'll admit, unpleasant for me, falls through, being utterly unsubstantiated by corroborative evidence. My friend, Davidson, you were decidedly wrong not to take ten pounds!"

"Was I? And suppose I can produce a letter in your handwriting suggesting what I should say and swear on that accursed court-martial. How then?"

Delpré gave a slight start and exclaimed, "You told me you had destroyed that letter."

"I did, and told you no lie as I thought at the time. It was not till I was on my way home to England that I discovered that letter in my dressing-case. Some whim made me keep it. How now? You don't seem quite so confident as you were. I think you'll drop that police officer. It'll be worse for you if you don't."

"Hum," said Delpré, who had by this time fully recovered himself. "It does make a difference, and I grant you that point in your game at once. Now, my friend, I'll sum up. I hand you over to the police if you don't make yourself scarce; this I most assuredly shall do if we don't come to terms to-night. You rake up and accuse me of this old bygone story. You a recently discharged convict from Pentonville, formerly of Her Majesty's service, from which you were ignominiously expelled for cheating at cards. You admit, to begin with, that on the court-martial that broke you, or rather on that of your fellow-swindler Belton, you were guilty of gross and barefaced perjury. Not much harm to me in all this. You produce a letter written by me (that is, supposing you have such a letter, which of course I doubt), and on that really rests your whole story. You're scarcely fool enough to think that I shall hesitate, even if you can produce such a letter, under the circumstances, to

deny my own handwriting. Forgery is a very likely accomplishment to acquire at Pentonville."

"D—n it," cried the other, who was considerably subdued by the cool reasoning of his opponent, "you always were a clever one. But you quite forget to reckon up the exposure part of it. There's a good many in England now, I dare say, who can recollect that old Neilgherry scandal. It wouldn't do you much good, I reckon."

Though he had not mentioned it, of course this had not escaped Delpré, but he had no idea of counting his adversary's trumps for him.

"Not so many as you think," he replied. "It's a long time ago. And who of the one or two who may recollect it, will think it worth while to travel down here to back a convicted felon? You've no money to pay a lawyer to show me up. You've not a leg to stand upon. My dear Davidson, you were decidedly wrong not to take that tenner."

"And how about your servant, when he admits letting me in to pass the evening with his master overnight. How'll that look?"

Delpré laughed pleasantly. "Quite a feather in my cap, I assure you, I love doing the intensely benevolent—old comrade—bad scrape—would have done what I could for him—find his past career disgraceful—rejected the sovereign I offered him with execrations—shocking to see a man of education brought so low. Don't wish to press the charge, &c. No, Davidson, it's all up with you. I never drive a beaten adversary quite to the wall; it's not whist! There's the original tenner I offered you; no jibbing now, you're out of Milton before one to-morrow, mind, or you'll take the consequences. Ah, one more glass of brandy-and-water if you like, though I think you've had about enough, and then good night."

Davidson, now thoroughly cowed, swallowed his brandy-and-water in silence. The old ascendancy that Delpré had exercised over him in by-gone years was completely re-established.

His crest dropped like that of a dog that has met his master. Nothing cowed a scoundrel more than the presence of his master in villany. He pocketed the ten pound note quietly, and took up his hat to go.

"Good night, Captain Delpré, and thanks."

"Good night, Davidson. One word before you go. Never try this game with me again; the next time, come what may of it to me, and I think that will be little to signify, it shall be penal servitude for you, my man. You know me, I think. Good night."

"Good night," muttered the other, and turned to leave the room.

"Stop," said Delpré; "you may be of use to me, or, rather, I may be able to throw a job in your way some time or another. Where are you to be found?"

"Well, the 'Three Crocuses,' Holborn, will find me for the present. When that won't, I'll let you know what will."

"All right. Not too many letters, mind." And Davidson departed.

"Well out of that scrape," muttered Delpré. "He was nearer drawing me for fifty once than he knew. I couldn't have stood any raking up of that old business. Lucky I knew my man, he never had any pluck when collared. Wonder whether he really has that letter; if so, I must have it: wouldn't have done to treat it as of any consequence to-night." With which observations he undressed and went to bed.

CHAPTER V.

THE THERMOPOLIUM—THE LADY OF KING'S CROSS.

Soot shines the gas through the ground glass shades in the smoking-room of the Thermopolium. Lightly play the smoke wreaths round the well-brushed heads of the occupants of

that paradise of London smoking-rooms. Softly tinkles the bell, and well-trained waiters take softly modulated orders for curacoa and seltzer, the insinuating gin sling, or the more ardent soda and cognac. The smoking-room of the Thermopolium is in all the well-bred decorous repose of eleven o'clock in the evening. Anon as 'the witching hour' approaches, the members assume a less decorous appearance. The bell rings with a sharp jerk, the conversation ceases to trickle in the subdued tone now characterizing it, the waiters quicken in their movements, the orders for curious and soothing liquids are delivered in sterner and more commanding tones. The buzz of conversation deepens, peals of laughter re-echo through the room. The best chaff and the latest anecdotes fly about from knot to knot, and a light cloud collects under the ventilating gas-burner. The room is filling fast; the theatres send back their bored or delighted votaries as the case may be. You hear of the intense dreariness of that thing at the Haymarket; of what a capital piece they are doing at the Olympic; how stalls couldn't be got at the Adelphi, or *vice versa*.

Into this pleasant den of scandal and dissipation saunters Jack Travers, clad in shining raiment, that is, in the white tie and sombre habiliments of the nineteenth century. As he looks round for a seat, he is accosted by a gentleman who is consuming his tobacco on his legs with his back to the fire.

"How do, Travers? haven't seen you for ages; where have you been? Country quarters, I suppose—you look like it. Collar's out of date, and hair wants cutting—the usual signs. Take a weed, Pontet gives them me."

"How are you, Coningsby?" said Jack, laughing; "delighted to see you, and try your baccy. Let's sit down and have a talk."

"Good," replied Coningsby Clarke, a fast subaltern of dragoons, and by no means a bad fellow, in spite of his affectation. "I have burnt myself nearly brown in my benevolent endeavours to keep the fire off old Caribosh there; he has been

snorting at me and using the most frightful language internally for the last five minutes."

"Where are you quartered now?" inquired Jack.

"Kensington Gate. All very nice if Government would attach the same salary to it they give a Lord of the Treasury, and keep some policemen to do the escort duty. But where do you spring from?"

"Milton, South Wales," replied Jack, "and a deuced good quarter too."

"Oh, yes, I know, they make iron, dig coal, and that sort of thing; what they call an enterprising and thriving population. Abounds, I believe, in illiterate heiresses. Miss Merthyr Tydvils who can't spell. You marry a heap of pig iron, and a rather short quantity of h's. Any of your fellows done it?"

"Well, no," laughed Jack, "and I should recommend you to explore the country before you hazard any more erroneous opinions."

"Thanks, but the Horse Guards, I hear, destine Ireland for our researches next year. We are in for bigger game, you see, Jack. You are advising a man to go and see the Lakes who has got his ticket for Niagara—to tour in Devonshire when he's booked for the Rocky Mountains. How's Delpré?"

"All right, and uncommon wide awake," replied Jack, and he related the story of the match.

"Cute, very cute! Coming it a little too strong, though, amongst his brother officers, I should say. You're on leave, of course—for how long? Going to stop in town, or what?"

"No, I am only passing through; going down to see a steeple-chase, and shoot in Blankshire with Charlie Repton. What's the news here?"

"Things much as usual, 'old Fluker' anathematising his luck and dividing two pools out of three on the average. Tomkinson still a source of horror and tribulation to the waiters. Caribosh there habitually harrying the same unfortunates on the subject of drafts and fires. I wonder he hasn't rung for

more coals, or to have the door shut since we sat down. Young Shadrach going through the mill in the next room," here Clarke jerked his head in the direction of the card-room, "and a goodish Indian story from Cucumber Smith. Wish the Cucumber was home again, he always kept us alive here."

"But who's Shadrach?" inquired Jack.

"Who is he? A lineal descendant of those who spoiled the Egyptians; though just now, I fancy the Egyptians are rather getting their own again. He would probably call himself the son of a great city financier. I should describe him as the son of a mighty Bill Discounter. By some accident he's got a cornetcy in the —th, and true to his blood, is an aspiring money-maker. The little brute deserves no mercy, for he is a cad after the order of Melchisedec; however, he believes in his whist—other people don't. Backs his opinion freely, and will soon have to pay for finding his knowledge of the game a little defective. But you are certain to see him in here ere long. He generally drops in when he 'cuts out,' with a cigar as long as himself, and inflicts hideous anecdotes about the thirteenth trump on the unwary."

"And how about the Cucumber's story?"

"Oh, that's soon told. Some one here had a letter from him the other day. I forget who just now, though I saw it. However, after mentioning that he had no chance of getting home this year, he went on to say: 'We used to laugh over what we called a regular old Indian yarn at the Thermopolium; but I give you my honour you must come to the country to hear the thing done in perfection. When at Rome *'Civis Romanus sum.'* So I hastened to adapt myself to the usages of the land, and at my first dinner-party told two or three stiffish stories, that I should hardly have ventured on in England. My good fellow, I was nowhere. The youngest griffin there could have given me two stone and won in a canter. To develop the imagination to the extent they bring it, I'm quite sure you must have the Indian sun applied to the brain at eighteen. I have sub-

mitted my brains to that ordeal too late in life ever to compete in the realms of romance with my 'better done' compatriots. The last and most magnificent specimen I secured of the veritable Indian story I send you. It was hot, aye, confoundedly hot (they lie fearfully, mind, on the subject of the heat, do these romantic East Indians)! It was the middle of the hot season. I lounged into mess not with much idea of eating anything, it was too hot for that, but because drinking claret cup under a punkah was the best way of killing time that occurred to me just then, I dropped into a chair next an old Indian colonel, who saluted me with—

“Hah, Smith, how are you? devilish hot, isn't it? how do you stand it? how's the appetite? can you eat anything?”

“Well, no, Colonel; I can't say I'm good at eating, this weather. I tell you what's not a bad thing, barring it's bilious sort of food—that is an egg beat up in a glass of sherry. I can always get that down.”

“Oh, you adopt that, do you? Curious! I recollect when I was up in the Punjaub in 1843, yes, it would be 1843, the time of the Meance affair, you know. I was in the Thirteenth, then. We had a droll dog in them, called Tom Simmonds. That was one of his receipts for getting through the hot weather. I think I hear him now! ‘Boy,’ he'd cry, just before leaving the mess, ‘bring me my medicine!’ and they used to bring him a mighty jorum of eggs and sherry. Yes, curious! he used to drink that off every night—odd of him. Thirteen eggs he used to have; just the number of the regiment, you know, beat up in thirteen glasses of sherry every night—fact, sir; 'pon my honour!”

“Not a muscle of that gallant officer's face moved as he imparted to me that gratuitous falsehood. Fancy a man topping up his evening with a bottle and a half of sherry, with thirteen eggs beat up in it, and not once, mind, but according to nightly custom! If anybody at the Thermopolium can beat that, send him out to us as Governor-General!”

"Well, yes," laughed Jack, "I'm afraid we've no one can pass that; I should think that colonel was a deuced pleasant fellow to pass the evening with."

"No doubt. Ah! here comes Tom Archer."

A stout, fresh-looking man in morning costume made his way to their table, nodded to Clarke, shook hands with Travers, and sat down.

"What are you two scapegraces grinning at? Have you really found something funny at one of the theatres—or has Coningsby unexpectedly said a good thing? if so, let's have it. It will be valuable from its rarity."

What Archer was or did, was one of the mysteries of the Thermopolium. He knew everybody and everything. Could talk operas or metaphysics, and had stood still at forty-five since anyone could recollect.

"Tell him Smith's story about the eggs and sherry," said Jack.

"Oh, ah, a fellow that took his egg nog by the kilderkin, I recollect. Should think the Cucumber's been inventing that ever since he went out. Nobody could have told it *au sérieux*, though he says he heard it. I've been over to Paris for ten days—saw Belle Brabazon there, looking handsomer than ever—wonder whether it's true she's going to marry Bartley, they say so. What's Charlie Repton say to it? he used to be very devoted there all last season; but Repton always is to some woman or other. Just one of those fellows who hover on the brink of matrimony half their life, and wind up by making a devil of a mess of it. Shouldn't wonder if he does. I must say I thought he meant business with 'the Brabazon,' though. Why, he used to contrive to get down to the Park in the morning to ride with her, and though Charlie could always make strong running in the evening, his morning devotions were usually of the most milk and water description."

"Who is Bartley?" inquired Jack.

"Don't know exactly; heavy swell on the Stock Exchange."

Never had any ancestors, I should think. Drives a solemn looking mail phaeton, with a splendid pair of greys, and rather too much gingerbread about the whole turn-out."

"I am going down to stay with Repton," said Jack, "and I'll tell him what you think of him, and what he'll come to if he don't reform."

"No, you needn't do that, though he knows pretty well what I think of him. Well, Coningsby, my son. How's Kensington Gate? It's a comfort to see you looking so well with all the cares of that important post on your mind."

"Kensington Gate is as it was; but we're going to Ireland in the spring, therefore make much of your Coningsby while it lasts, for the time is coming when you will see him no more—when he will be beyond the reach of your soft invocations to Richmond feeds, and you will say 'we could have better spared a better man.'"

"Sorry to hear that, but I notice you fellows quartered in Ireland still spend as much time as you can contrive in England. So I shan't despair of hair breadth escapes on the way home from Greenwich in your company before long."

"Oh, what fun we had that day. Wish you had been there, Jack. You might have sung 'Cigars and Cognac' to the top of your bent that night. Are you still as 'spoony' on that beautiful ballad as you were? The first time I heard you, I believe you sang it three times and nobody could stop you."

"A truce to your reminiscences, I'm off to roost. Halloa! who's that?" and Jack called attention to a slight dark youth with a Jewish cast of countenance, rather overdone in the matter of studs and buttons, who had just entered.

"Shadrach, the Israelite," responded Clarke, "I told you about him. Don't you see the way he keeps spluttering about, as if he had a hair in his mouth. Sure sign he's been losing. He never can help showing it. They can't even teach him to lose his money like a gentleman. How do, Shady? Been making your fortune to-night?"

"How are you, Clarke? No, that fool Forster trumped my best spade. You never saw such a case. I'll just show it you."

"Sorry, but my ball's waiting for me at pool in the next room. Forster never could play whist. Good-night, Jack," and with a nod to Archer, Coningsby Clarke departed.

Travers followed his example, and smoked a meditative cigar as he strolled home.

A cab deposited Jack and a pile of luggage at the King's Cross terminus the next afternoon. Consigning his baggage to the hands of a porter, he lounged towards the booking office. There was a crush for tickets, and his attention was arrested by a good-looking, lady-like girl, who was vainly striving to reach the little window. A great stout, vulgar-looking man, with one of those extremely shiny hats extremely vulgar men generally affect, pushed rudely across her. She drew back with a hurt gesture, and a look of mingled scorn and indignation flashed across her face. The chivalry of Jack's nature was roused. Precipitating himself violently upon the stout gentleman's toes, he ground his ribs remorselessly against the corner of the box placed in front of the ticket window, eliciting the exclamation of—

"Alloa, alloa!—puff, puff. I say. Confound it, young man—puff. Where are you a shoving to?"

"Trying to get out of this young lady's way," urbanely responded Jack as he gave the stout man's ribs another rasp on the bar corner.

"Tell you what it is, young feller; you want the check taken out of you, I think."

"Quite the other way, and to begin with, take off your hat when you speak to a gentleman," and Jack dexterously topped off the shiny hat.

"I tell you what it is, I'll punch your 'ead if you don't pick up that 'at," puffed the gentleman, foaming.

"I shan't do the one, and you won't do the other," said Jack,

and after a brief survey of Travers' face, the irate gentleman came to the conclusion that carrying out his threat looked hardly feasible, and condescended to pick up his own hat.

The young lady's face bore an expression of mingled gratitude and amusement. There is nothing women feel more grateful for at the time, than the sharp correction of an impertinence they are themselves powerless to resent. The crest-fallen appearance of the discomfited cockney, as he picked up his hat, brought a triumphant smile to her lips, and, with a slight bow, she said—

"I thank you, sir, for kindly taking my part against that ill-bred person. I have often travelled alone; but little in England. Abroad, the commonest labourer would have made way for me."

"Can I be of any further use?" inquired Jack.

"Thanks. Will you take me a ticket for Hitchin?"

Jack complied, and as she paid him out of a slender little purse, glanced curiously at the lady whose part he had so suddenly espoused.

She was very young, not much above sixteen, with a bright sunshiny face, large brown eyes, and great masses of hair to match, that almost defied the control of her bonnet, and threatened to tumble down and envelope her every moment. Tall, and quietly dressed, though in a style that a more practised eye than Jack's would have pronounced slightly foreign—she spoke and moved with a free, easy, unconstrained carriage, and acknowledged Travers' courtesy without the slightest awkwardness, and as if it was no more than behoved a gentleman under the circumstances.

"Let me see after your things, and put you in a carriage."

She bowed, and Jack proceeded to see the luggage duly labelled, a proceeding in which the young lady obtained an undue advantage, insomuch as Jack's gun case set forth his name and regiment in full, while her trunks bore no name or address.

"You won't object to me as a fellow-passenger, I trust," said Jack, as he handed her into a carriage.

"Certainly not. Like a damsel of old, I feel bound to reward the knight errant who so fearlessly broke a lance in my cause," she replied, laughing. "If all people's ribs who displeased me were destined to be so unpleasantly visited as my fat enemy's, I should be a most formidable person to provoke."

"I can only trust I may be always in the way when needed."

"Don't make foolish speeches, sir; you have rendered me a service," she continued, gravely, "and I am sure do not wish to oppress me with a sense of it."

"I beg pardon, I didn't mean," floundered Jack, in all the hopeless perplexity of being engaged in conversation with a lady whom he couldn't make out.

"Not at all, I expect you to be extremely entertaining, mind, and tell me the names of all the places we pass. It's all so new to me; though I am an English girl, it's years since I saw my own country."

"You've lived abroad?" suggested Jack, ingeniously.

"Yes, in France or Italy since I was ten years old. I only returned to England about a year ago."

"And are you going to live at Hitchin? it's a pretty place."

"Not fair, sir," she said, "it's not customary for young ladies to furnish their addresses to gentlemen who may be their fellow-travellers, however useful they may make themselves. Do you know what I'm thinking of?" she continued, laughing. "I was thinking of my fat friend's face as he picked up his 'at. The self-satisfied complacent expression was so thoroughly taken out of it. Do you know I was wicked enough for one moment to wish he would try to make you pick it up."

"Why?" inquired Jack.

"Well, I was very angry, and I thought if he did, he would not forget insulting me for some time."

"And pray, what did you think on my account?"

"Pshaw," she rejoined, contemptuously. "I had no more

thought on your account than you had. It would have been a very poor compliment, Monsieur, to have thought of you under the circumstances."

"Well," laughed Jack, "I can't say I think there was much to be nervous about as far as I was concerned."

"Ah," she continued, "I am going through a sterner battle to-night. Meeting relations whom I have never seen, and who will no doubt be all prepared to think badly of me on account of my foreign education. Dear me, I suppose I must give up being lively for fear of shocking them, and they'll think me dreadful if I talk, won't they?"

"Well, they must be hard to please if you don't satisfy them," said Jack.

"What, compliments again!" and she merrily menaced Jack with her parasol. "*Prenez garde, Monsieur*, I shall reckon you but some carpet knight, after all. 'Honest and true' is my motto. You have worn my colours to-day; you may adopt my motto. Oh, dear! how shall I get on, I wonder? I have always been allowed to do as I liked; I am quite a spoiled girl, and now I shall have to keep regular hours, and be so dreadfully particular."

"I dare say they will be kind enough to let you have your own way pretty much; I should fancy you'd get it wherever you went, in the long run."

"How dare you say such things, making me out artful and designing? For that's what you mean, I suppose."

"Can't you fancy your getting your own way without being anything of that kind?" said Jack, much amused.

"And if I can," laughed the young lady, "you have no business to fancy it."

"I'll say nothing more, then; but that you've a way of your own which passeth my dull comprehension, but in the efficacy of which I have no doubt, and I prophesy in less than a fortnight you'll be the tyrant of that unfortunate household," and as Jack contemplated the bright face and graceful figure opposite

him, he thought they must be very grim people indeed who could say no to anything her clear ringing voice might request.

She looked at him, an arch smile playing on her lips, and showing a beautiful set of teeth, though in a rather large mouth.

"You recreant knight!" she exclaimed, "to turn round upon me thus, instead of compassionating my position, you accuse me of aiming at tyranny and despotism."

"I accuse you of nothing, I only prophesy. I'll say no more. Treat that family as leniently as you can."

"Very good, sir. I'll remember how you interceded in their behalf, and as I am strong, be merciful. I am very good when not provoked, and very amiable when I have my own way. Oh, how cold it looks!" and she shuddered as she looked out of the window.

"Yes, it's not the time of year 'our native land' looks at its best; especially for ladies. They have so little to do in the country during the winter months, I always pity them. They can't shoot, very few of them hunt. Too cold to drive for pleasure—too dirty to walk! They have nothing but their own resources to look to."

"*Merci, Monsieur!* you are too hard! Nothing but their own resources! and what more should they want? I can quite account for your commiseration. Oh, you men, you *do* look unhappy in wet weather! I have seen some of you cast upon *your* resources—they are very limited. Smoke, billiards, the newspaper—the paper, billiards, and more tobacco, and then you paste your noses to the window, look at the weather, and moan piteously!"

"Well," laughed Jack, "I am afraid that's a little like it with some of us during a wet day in the country."

"And yet one hears so much of the pleasantness of English country houses—*La vie de château* I have always pictured to myself as the beau-ideal of charming genial society."

"So it is, there is nothing jollier; but people confound English country-house life, with the life of people who live in the coun-

try. When you have a great big house, thousands a year to keep it up with, and thousands of acres to sport over, you have no difficulty in filling the 'big house' with a pleasant party, that's English country-house life. But the life of people who live in the country is a different thing. Moderate-sized houses, widely scattered, and hard work to collect an occasional dinner-party. I don't know what phase you are about to encounter."

"Oh, dear, the latter—horrible! what a dreadful picture: how could you be so cruel? Well, I am not going to try it for very long. I have my painting things, and I suppose there is a piano. But surely this must be Hitchin?"

The train slackened its speed as she spoke.

"Yes," replied Jack. "Have you got all your things? I will get out and see about your baggage."

"Thanks, very much, but I need not trouble you any more. I shall be met here. Good-bye, Mr. Travers, and many thanks for all the care you have taken of me."

"Why, how do you know my name?"

"Not very difficult as long as you travel with that gun-case."

"Ah! yes, of course. And by what name am I to remember you?"

"As the 'Lady of King's Cross,'" she replied, and with a light musical laugh she bowed, and sprang forward to address an old gentleman, who was evidently in quest of some one of the new arrivals.

Jack watched her slight graceful figure as she went down the platform in search of her luggage.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "What a jolly girl she is. How I wish I knew who she was."

A sharp "any more going on" broke his meditations, and Jack jumped back into his carriage. He thrust his head out of the window as the train moved off, and was rewarded by a bright smile and little nod from his late companion, who was still standing on the platform.

Lighting a cigar, Jack was soon lost in reverie. *Punch* fell

neglected from his knee, and a periodical also bought to relieve the tedium of his journey rolled unheeded to the bottom of the carriage. The subject of his musings was of course his late fellow-traveller. Who could she be? She was a lady evidently, if he knew anything about it, and like most men of his age, Jack thought he knew a good deal. As we grow older we mistrust our judgment more. We have been so often deceived by appearances, that we judge hardly on such occasions. Her frank girlish confidence would by many men have been wrongly interpreted. She would have been set down as a forward young woman, and our friend Jack as very weak for not having ascertained her name and all about her. Many of his acquaintances would have said to him: "My dear fellow, she evidently meant you should, and is doubtless laughing now at what an overgrown schoolboy she travelled with, who hadn't the *savoir vivre* to follow up the opening she had given him. You can't expect a woman to meet you more than half way, if you won't come the other she can't help it."

And yet Jack felt instinctively she had not meant it. He thought of the bright, fair, innocent face, the arch, yet candid brown eyes, the merry laugh, and vowed she was 'no pirate of the seas,' but like her own motto, 'honest and true.' She was very young and pretty to be travelling alone. "I wish I knew her name," he muttered, for the twentieth time. "Pshaw! what a fool I was not to inquire of one of the porters who the old gentleman was that came to meet her. It's odds they'd have known." Then the musical voice rang again in his ears, and he felt bitter compunctions that he'd not thrashed that fat, greasy cockney at King's Cross. "Well, it's no use, I suppose I shan't see her again. Horribly behind time they are. Will they ever get to Moretown?" Then he tried *Punch*, voted it gone to the bad, and getting duller every week. Turned up his nose at one of Leech's happiest efforts, and went through all the vagaries men do when dissatisfied. We all know the feeling. When the dinner is bad, the wine poison. Can't think where they

manufacture such a disgraceful equivalent for tobacco ! Call this shooting, or so-and-so amusing ? that book clever, or such a girl nice ? Whatever it is, it's all the same. The causes vary, but liver and ill-temper have it pretty much between them.

"Moretown ! Moretown !" shrieked the porters, or to use their vernacular, "Moret'n." Travers got out, found the wagonette waiting, and himself, in the course of twenty minutes or so, duly deposited at Dunnington.

"Delighted to see you, Jack," said Charlie Repton, as he shook him warmly by the hand. "'Though years have rolled by us since we last time met,' I still recollect your weakness for a glass of sherry before dinner. There's some on the side table. The train's late, and you'll have to display all your military alertness in dressing. We've got Forbes and Lyttlereck coming to-morrow, the house full, and all to do honour to your humble servant's success in the steeple-chase the next day."

"Well, I suppose you mean winning. Your people all well ?"

"Quite, thanks ; and the mare too, though you didn't ask after her. Rather a leading character just now. But run away and dress, the governor's a mean opinion of people who are late for dinner," and Charlie led the way upstairs.

CHAPTER VI.

TOM LYTTLERECK'S ROOMS.

"I SAY, Tom, who is that Cis Langton you spoke of down at Dunnington ?" inquired Frank Forbes. "The man who sold Charlie the mare, which we are just going down to see win the Hunt Steeple-chase."

The scene of the above question was Tom Lyttlereck's rooms in the Temple, and a curious *mélange* the said rooms were. Generally, to the close observer, a man's character is very much reflected in the den he inhabits. I use the word den advisedly,

because I am alluding to that one *sanctum* which even after marriage a man reserves unto himself, where the disorder we so much love is still revelled in ; where under no pretence of "putting to rights" are malignant hand-maids allowed to banish our pet authors to inaccessible shelves, break our favourite and trusty meerschaums ; burn the rubbish collected on the writing-table, including that valuable treatise on 'Social Amenities,' which we have been intending to finish any time the last two years. Hide that old and much loved smoking-jacket at the bottom of our drawers, and finally consummate her iniquities by placing our slippers in what she deems their proper place, being naturally the very last place in which we should dream of looking for them.

Though an observer might have picked up a good deal of Tom's habits and pursuits, still the extreme versatility apparent therein would have puzzled him. Books always form a leading feature in the study of a room ; but here the reader was to all appearances so extremely erratic, that it was difficult to draw a conclusion. The 'Racing Calendar' lay side by side with Lyell's 'Antiquity of Man,' Wycherley and Congreve, 'The Plurality of Worlds,' 'The Sporting Magazine,' 'In Memoriam,' 'Montaigne,' 'Cœlebs on Whist,' a volume or two of Lacy's Acting Drama and Junius Letters formed a chaos from which it was difficult to deduce anything. A print of the winner of the Derby hung over the mantel-piece. Another of Frith's picture of the Sea-side. A couple of clever pen and ink sketches entitled respectively, 'My Bark is on the sea,' and 'Gaily goes the Ship when the wind blows fair,' representing the start and the termination of a bad passage across the Channel, with 'Harvest in the Highlands,' constituted the picture gallery. A pipe-rack over the mantel-piece containing some dozen specimens of the briar, the cutty, and the meerschaum, announced in pretty positive terms that the proprietor smoked. The furniture was, as he described it himself, of the composite or amalgamated period, and while the owner luxuriated in a rocking-

chair, Frank Forbes was stretched on a huge old-fashioned sofa, made comfortable through the medium of various scientifically disposed cushions and a bear's skin. Some dozen oyster shells and their concomitants marked the fact that they had lunched, and they were soothing their nerves with tobacco when Forbes propounded the above question.

"Cis Langton!" replied Tom. "Well, yes, he's a mystery, from the fact that he apparently breaks continually, and as constantly recovers. We see lots of fellows live fast, keep big studs, &c., and come to grief; they disappear and the world knows them no more. Here and there a relative diēs and leaves one of these outcasts a fortune, he reappears and once more takes his place; but then we know how he did it, his uncle the Indian judge, or the rich old aunt at Cheltenham set him on his legs again; but though I have seen Cis Langton 'go' four or five times, nobody has ever been able to explain how he recovered. He disappears, but in two years or so there he is again with horses, money, and nobody knows how."

"What is your own theory on the subject?" inquired Frank.

"God knows, they say he's a *placer* in Mexico, a gold mine in California, buried treasure at Anticosta, that he speculates in New York. Nobody but himself, I believe, knows his resources, though I have a mild guess. Should you like to know as much as I know of Cis Langton's history?"

"Very much, I only just know him by sight."

"Well, I'll tell you as much as I know about him. Cis Langton was a man who started in life with some seven or eight thousand pounds. His parents died while he was quite young, and his guardians in due course sent him to Oxford. There he went through the regular round of an Oxford life, but was tolerably steady all the same; if he didn't read very hard, neither were his irregularities very flagrant. In the course of one vacation, Cis accompanied two or three other fellows on a reading visit to a clergyman at Tenby. The parson had a daughter, a pale, fair, blue-eyed girl, who was his only child.

She was just eighteen when Cis first met her, rather pretty, though nothing more to most eyes ; but her soft, rather helpless manner and delicate, fragile look vanquished Cis at once. It's an immutable law of nature, the strong men are always attracted by the most fragile and fairy-like of the sex, the weak and vacillating fall easy captives to the strong-minded women—the 'Mrs. MacStingers' marry them off hand. Short men marry tall women, and *vice versa*. No wonder Cis, the coxswain of his college eight and an acknowledged 'hard man' with the drag, should feel pity for the delicate girl. 'Pity's mighty akin to love,' they say, and in three weeks Cis was about as bad 'a case' as could be well found. He was hopelessly 'spooney' on Lucy Rawson.

"Her mother was dead, she believed, but this was a subject on which she never could induce her father to touch. She said she could just recollect her mother, though she had no recollection of her death, and her father always refused to answer her questions on this point, and got very angry if she alluded to the subject, 'The only thing, I think, he ever was angry with me about,' said Lucy, talking it over one day with her lover.

"By the time the vacation was over, it was all over with Cis too ; though he had as yet not spoken to the Rev. James Rawson, he went back to Oxford an engaged man. It steadied him, and he took a degree, a circumstance which up to this had been rather dubious. After some humming and hawing, the father gave his consent, and it was settled they should be married as soon as Cis saw his way in the world a little. He started for the Bar, and worked hard. An occasional run down to Tenby lightened his labours, and the first year closed on rosy prospects for Cis Langton. In the second his *fiancée's* letters disturbed him terribly ; they still teemed with affection, but she didn't think she was suited to him. She should never cease to love him, but he had better forget her. Cis was in a desperate state of mind, he posted off to Tenby. Lucy seemed in awfully low

spirits ; while he was with her, her spirits seemed to revive, and her every glance and tone showed affection for him, he thought. Still, when he talked of their marrying as soon as he was called to the Bar, she always answered with tears ; that no one could tell what might happen by then, that after all he had better forget her. What was the matter ? She was subject to low spirits. Her father said it was all nothing. She was only a nervous, whimsical girl, and she would get over it all when she had a house to look after.

“ Cis returned to town, more puzzled and infatuated than ever ; her letters immediately got colder and more despondent than before. It was the same story, never cease to love him, &c., but he'd better forget her. Cis went down there again, had a tremendous scene. It was at last settled they were to be married when he was ‘called,’ and he was not to see her again till then ; but she made him swear to see her once more under any circumstances, whatever he might hear about her. It seemed an odd whim, but Cis didn't think much about it at the time. Her letters became fewer and shorter than before. Still poor Cis was so infatuated about her that he worked wearily on, thinking at all events everything would be cleared up at the end of the year, when he would be entitled to write himself ‘barrister-at-law.’ Latterly he ceased to hear from her at all, and no sooner was the final ceremony over than he started for Tenby. He little knew, poor fellow, what awaited him there.

“ On arriving at Mr. Rawson's, that gentleman received him most frigidly, and expressed his astonishment at seeing him. Cis was bewildered.

“ ‘After what has happened,’ continued Mr. Rawson, ‘I should have thought delicacy might have induced you to refrain from a personal interview, until you had at least heard from me.’

“ ‘But good Heavens !’ said poor Cis, ‘what has happened ?’

“ ‘I presume, sir, you read the papers. I think the errors and misfortunes of my former life have been commented on in

them sufficiently. You can hardly think it will gratify me to talk over the miserable story. I shall leave this place as soon as I possibly can, and probably England.'

"'Good God, sir! I am in utter ignorance to what you allude, I have been hard worked the whole of this week and haven't looked at a paper. Where is Lucy?'

"At the mention of his daughter's name Mr. Rawson's face softened.

"'Poor girl, poor girl, she is very ill; I sent her away. I beg pardon, but I of course thought you knew everything, and therefore that you and I had better not meet. You loved my daughter, Langton, I believe; my darling Lucy. Ah, I have paid bitterly for the sin of my youth—good-bye, God bless you! I really cannot and will not tell you the story of my miserable life. Rawson *versus* Rawson in the papers will explain everything—good bye,' and wringing Langton's hand he left the room.

"Rawson *versus* Rawson was a *de lunatico inquirendo* case. It appeared that Mrs. Rawson was not dead, but an inmate of an asylum, and had been so for many years; this was a petition for 'release and alimony' on the grounds that she was no longer insane. That she had been so originally there was no doubt; but the trial went to prove that she was sane now, and had been for the last three years or so. But the worst part of the case for Rawson was, that it came out that he had never been married to her; she had always passed as his wife, but the marriage ceremony had never been gone through.

"Such was a brief epitome of what Cis Langton found in the papers under the head of 'Rawson *versus* Rawson;' but in spite of this exposé his faith to Lucy never wavered for an instant, and twenty-four hours saw him again at Rawson's door. Mr. Rawson had gone to London for two or three days by the first train that morning. No, the servants had no idea where Miss Lucy was staying; it was months before Cis found out the whole truth. All his letters to Rawson remained unan-

swered, and that gentleman himself returned to Tenby only for a few hours, and then departed, nobody knew where.

"Cis was untiring in his efforts to discover Lucy. He harped continuously upon the oath he had sworn, viz., 'to see her again under any circumstances,' and the result of those inquiries was that Cis found himself one fine autumn day knocking at the door of a pretty country house near London.

"His cheek might well be pale and his lip quiver, for the house was a private lunatic asylum, and he knew that she he had sought so long and loved so well was an inmate. He was admitted, and after a little delay was shown into a parlour, where he found Lucy gazing dreamily out of the window. Poor girl, she did not show the slightest sign of recognition, the blue eyes stared fixedly down some awful vista known only to the poor warped brain behind them; so she'd sit, the matron said, for hours, occasionally weeping silently, but taking no notice of what went on around her. She was very quiet and tractable, but the doctor told Cis it was as hopeless a case of melancholy madness (generally, I believe, the worst kind,) as he had ever had.

"It seemed that poor Lucy had discovered inadvertently after her engagement to Langton, that her mother was alive and in an asylum. The shock to the frail nervous system was great. She feared to let her father know of her discovery—the oppression of this, to her awful secret, soon induced the horrible idea that insanity was hereditary, and that she would ere long be bereft of her senses—hence her unaccountable letters to Cis. Then came the trial—the shock of that, the discovery of her illegitimacy, her anguish at the idea of losing her lover, her frail nervous temperament combined with the dread idea of insanity not unnaturally produced it.

"To cut a long story short, she gradually wasted away, and about a year afterwards died, her unconscious hand locked in Cis Langton's, though she never recovered her reason. Cis from that hour was a broken man—the only stake in life he cared to

win he had played for and lost. He played, hunted, raced ; perpetual excitement seemed absolutely necessary to him, and everything was better than his own thoughts. At the end of less than two years Cis was more than suspected of being in difficulties, a heavy facer on 'The Two Thousand,' followed by a regular knock down on 'The Chester Cup' finished him, and for close on two years I never saw him ; then he turned up again all right, went again, and, as I tell you, has 'gone' and recovered three or four times."

"Sad and curious story," remarked Forbes, "but you haven't mentioned your guess at what does duty for 'the gold mine,' Mexican placer, or whatever it may be. I confess to much curiosity on that point."

"Well, mine is rather a vague conjecture after all ; but some three years ago I and a friend were doing a pedestrian tour in North Wales. After a long tramp we found ourselves late one afternoon at the country town of Harlech. Now, it's the greatest possible mistake on these occasions to go to a grand hotel, if you can meet with the old country inn. That venerable institution is, I grieve to say, getting scarcer every day, still when you do meet it, don't miss it. I know of two or three yet, one in Winchester, another in Monmouthshire, where the house has no particular shape ; in which the coffee-room seems all sides and corners, and where the doors, as a rule, don't seem meant for shutting ; but still, where beds are clean, food and drink good, civility great, and charges moderate. Well, an inn something of this stamp we came across at Harlech. After finishing our dinner, we asked the waiter what there was to see in the neighbourhood. He was a cheerful and rather talkative waiter, and having suggested one or two things near the town for the morrow, he exhorted us much to go and hear Mr. Darnley Shaw's Lecture on 'Here and there' at the Town Hall. We did, and a very good entertainment it was. Mr. Shaw was an easy, fluent lecturer, discoursed pleasantly of his travels ; drew neat sketches, and did neat impersonations of

people he had met ; had some good anecdotes, and sang two or three good songs, so that on the whole we returned well pleased to our inn. After smoking a pipe on the steps, we went towards the coffee-room for a glass of grog before turning in.

" 'Nobody there,' said said our friend the waiter, 'but Mr. Darnley Shaw.'

"If that wasn't Cis Langton, I'll lose a ten pound note on it ! You would have hardly known it was the same man that we had heard lecture, he must have been thoroughly made up. However, he didn't recognise me in the least—I knew him but slightly then ; and though I entered into conversation with him, and tried all I knew, he never in the slightest degree admitted that he was other than Mr. Darnley Shaw, even smiling pleasantly when I told him how like he was to a friend of mine called Langton."

"And you think that's the way he replenishes his exchequer?" asked Forbes.

"Of course !" laughed Tom. "Travels about the provinces with a piano, and draws the natives for hundreds. Anyway, he'd a good house at Harlech."

"Well, I hope the mare he sold Charlie is as good as we all think she is. Sad disappointment if she don't win at Moretown, won't it be?"

"Yes ; and by Jove our time's about up—take us twenty minutes to get to the station. Here, Jim, you vagabond ! fetch a cab, look sharp !" and Tom rushed into his bed-room to put the finishing touches to his packing arrangements.

Tom and Frank Forbes found themselves forming part of a rather numerous assembly in the Dunnington drawing-room that evening. The Clippington girls had come over. Mrs. Inglemere was there, radiant in smiles and toilette. As Jack Travers beheld Charlie Repton's attentions, he concluded that the smoking-room gossip of the Thermopolium was rather idle scandal, or Charlie's devotion to Miss Brabazon a thing of the past. That men can be in love with two women at the same

time, was a contingency which Jack's single-hearted philosophy did not acknowledge.

They laughed over the Moretown ball. Laura Clippington was full of Mrs. Simpson, the genteel grazing widow, for Tom's edification. "She had made all sorts of inquiries. It would be so nice. Pretty clean white house. She'd been to see it! He would have the cows close under the window (Laura's ideas of a grazing farm were vague) so that he could look after them at any moment; in fact, whenever the widow allowed him a moment to spare. Widows were rather *exigeante*," here she glanced slightly at Mrs. Inglemere and Charlie; "but she was sure Mr. Lyttlereck would never give cause to complain on that account."

Tom parried all this badinage as well as he could. "What a thing it was to have one so attentive to his interests on the spot, he looked entirely to her!"

"And now, Miss Laura, having discussed my particular affairs, may I ask what you have been doing with yourself lately?"

"Oh, yes," she replied. "I looked on at some charades at the Dullingtons; oh, so dreary. Assisted at a dance at the Breretons; piano, carpets, and country curates. Went to see the hounds meet, *in a carriage*, at Cracklow gorse—the coldest day of the season, and of course they didn't find. Have pretended to do a deal of worsted work for Mrs. Brereton's bazaar. I haven't done a thing really, and shall have to buy some things for it. Got into disgrace for showing an indifference on the subject of Sunday schools, and electrified them on the organ at Miningsby one Saturday. That's about the sum of my iniquities since we last met."

"Laura, come here, we want you," said Agnes Repton, who was at the piano, "come and sing something. Here's Mr. Forbes says he can't, and Mr. Travels follows suit."

"Oh, don't let Jack begin yet," chimed in Charlie. "He's like a musical box; when he's once set going he never stops till

he's sung all his tunes through. I forget just now how many it is he knows."

"You needn't be frightened, Miss Repton," replied Jack, laughingly. "I wish I could do anything for you in that way. I should be only too happy, I'm sure. Charlie is not quite so voracious as he might be."

"Mrs. Inglemere, do you hear my character being torn to shreds? Won't you say something for me?"

"Don't ask me," murmured the widow softly. "I think you are quite able to take care of yourself."

The widow eschewed general conversation on principle. In a *tête-à-tête*, her magnificent eyes stood her in great service. She left her companion to do the talking; smiled, looked charmed or indignant as the occasion required. She had not the gift of talking, and she knew it. *Tête-à-tête* with a looking-glass or a talkative admirer, and she was thoroughly at home. She was great in the right smile, the right interjection, in the right toss or turn of the head. Her pose was perfect. She knew how to use her grand black eyes, and could express a good deal with her eyebrows. There she stopped, and intellectually was as stupid as a provincial leading article. Here Laura burst out with *La donna e mobile*, and the men clustered round the piano. She'd a fine contralto voice, had been well taught and sang *con amore*.

"Yes," said Minnie Clippington, in answer to an observation of Travers's. "We shall have a great day's fun to-morrow. All the neighbourhood will be there. I do hope Charlie will win. It will be a sad blow to us Dunnington people, if we don't come home triumphant."

"Do you wear his colours?" and as he spoke he wondered what his fair unknown would have called 'hers.' She said he had worn them.

"Oh, yes, blue and white, we all wear them to-morrow."

"With so many fair supporters he must win."

"I don't know that," laughed Minnie. "I have my bill at

Piver's to convince me that ladies don't always win. We always 'go for the gloves;' but, alas, the gloves often go from us."

"Treason, rank treason, in the camp," cried Agnes Repton. "Charlie, here's a faint-hearted supporter, who would, I verily believe, back the what d'ye call it, but not you."

"The field against the favourite," said Jack. "Miss Clippington, you will be ruined. We are all bound to support our champion."

"No, I don't mean that; but I have misgivings."

"Misgivings!" said Charlie. "She'll turn atheist next. She don't believe in 'Polly Perkins.' Ring the bell for some wine and water and 'the Ghost.' Thanks, Tom."

"Ah, we are to have the ghost properly done this time. We must not have it all terminate in an owl," said Laura.

"Why don't you aspirate it?" retorted Charlie. "I'm sure it was an owl with an 'H' the first night."

"Don't be rude, sir. What business have you to ask people to stay in such dilapidated mansions,

"'Whose hollow turrets woo the whistling breeze?'

You ought to be ashamed of yourself; owls about the staircase, indeed; why don't you send for the glaziers?"

"Ah! here come the stimulants," quoth Charlie. "Mrs. Inglemere, let me get you something," and Charlie dashed off to the sideboard; the widow was looking charming, but their conversation had languished.

"Of course you go to Ryalston the week after next for the theatricals, Mr. Travers," said Agnes Repton.

"Oh, dear, yes; I'm quite what's termed a stock actor in Lechlumere's troop. Charlie has played there too before, I know."

"Yes, and the Miss Clippingtons are to make their *début* this year. It's always a very pleasant week."

Candlesticks were now in request, and good-nights exchanged.

"Good-night, Charlie," cried Laura, "both to you and Polly Perkins; recollect, if you don't win I'm a ruined young woman. Don't let him smoke, Mr. Lyttlereck, or he'll have no nerves to-morrow, and stop to look at the brook as if he'd got hydrophobia."

"Avaunt, thou prophetess of ill omen," replied Charlie, as Laura ran laughing upstairs. "May his Lordship of Derrington haunt thy slumbers. Well, you fellows know your way to the smoking-room. I am going to eschew tobacco to-night for Polly Perkins' sake."

"You'll pull through to-morrow, I suppose," said Travers.

"Should do. The mare's very fit, has the speed of everything, I think; and she's a good fencer."

"Well, good-night. I'm off for a weed. Luck to-morrow."

CHAPTER VII.

THE HUNT STEEPLE-CHASE.

A DULL grey morning. The grand old Minster loomed through the mist, and looked down upon the Moretown race-course like some old world Titan contemplating the mushroom sports of the nineteenth century. On that very sward it may have looked over tournaments like the lists at Ashby, and seen the steel-clad Norman knights go down, as perhaps may be the fate of some of the gaily silk-attired horsemen of to-day. That hill on which it stands may have seen many a chariot race with noble Romans laying the odds in sesterces, for Moretown is a city of the olden times, and not a little proud of her 'Roman remains.' But though Moretown has done with the Romans, she is still so far classical that once a year she indulges in races, thereby assembling 'the Greeks' of the betting ring, who vociferate their fierce war cries of "The field for fifty." "Nobody names the winner for ten."

There are few prettier race-courses than Moretown. The stand, placed on a slightly rising ground, looks over the undulating grass oval that constitutes the flat race-course. Where the red flags are placed marks whence you diverge into the steeplechase course. A nice grass country interspersed with fair hunting fences, and only one field of plough in the whole. There is one bad point in it, that is the sharp right angle, at which you turn back again into the course to finish, after the preceding little cross-country excursion. Still Moretown is a popular cross-country Meeting, the Open Chase generally fills well, and the grim old Minster frowns yearly upon a large and incongruous gathering.

I like these north country meetings,—so different from the ‘holiday outings’ of the south. These sturdy agriculturists, these blunt-spoken cattle jobbers, knowing corn-factors, cunning dealers in seeds and cake, auctioneers, tradespeople, &c., they all come for, and enter into the sport. They know all about the horses; they know what they have done, and make shrewd guesses at what they ought to do. They don’t forget such a horse is liable to a five pound penalty for that Warwick performance, and then they know what five lb. means. They criticise the riders, have seen most of them go, and are pretty good judges of what they are worth on the back of a horse.

“No more hands than a bargeman.” “Will think he’s winning half a mile from home.” Such are the observations you hear on all sides as “the gentlemen” take their preliminary. “Dal it all, but he can go, d’ye mind how he had the brook that day from Cracklow Gorse,” and the north-countryman hustles his way into the ring, and backs his opinion for a sovereign or two. Come home with them in the train, they talk it all over. Tell how such a race was won out of the fire; how so and so came too soon, or how “Darn my buttons, I knowed it all along, and there I was humbugging about with some brandy and water and Bill Maddison, instead of backing it.”

In an Epsom train, if they know what's won the Derby, it's as much as they do. The Cup Day at Ascot the same. They go for false noses, knock-em-downs, Aunt Sally, a spree, roulette, or what you will. The northern men go to race. However, the present is no race meeting, and though during the vacation of the regular racing season, some of the north country speculators will run down to see the fun, the Hunt Steeple-Chase is but a local gathering.

Great was the despondency that existed round the breakfast table at Dunnington. Laura Clippington suggested that Charlie should change his colours to something startling, as the best of race-glasses could never follow white and sky blue through that mist. Mrs. Inglemere thought it dangerous that the races should be put off, and inwardly chafed, that her becoming toilette must be shawled heavily. Tom observed, "We shall only see it run from the straight, Charlie." Jack Travers came to the conclusion that it would be deuced cold, and went to make some private arrangements in which a cigar-case and pocket-flask were prominently concerned. Charlie Repton having intimated to the company that it would be "greasy going," he took himself to a conference with the stud groom, to which Tom Lyttlereck was eventually summoned; while Minnie Clippington shared her misgivings with Forbes, which, judging from their countenances, were brighter than the hopes of the others.

Through the grey mist, now beginning to lift, whirled the Dunnington carriages, gay with the sky blue and white favours, looking like a cross between a wedding party and a University boat race. The ladies were duly established in the stand, and the men had mostly descended to the betting lawn, now well filled with country gentlemen, yeomen farmers, sporting wool-factors, corn-dealers, &c., smoking, cracking their jokes, talking gravely over the forthcoming races (for the Hunt was to be followed by the Farmers' Steeple-chase), latest prices at Mark Lane, &c.

Charlie and Jack Travers lounged through the crowd, and

many were the greetings lavished on Charlie, who was both well known and popular. "You'll be about winning to-day, Mr. Repton." "Quite well, sir; hope the mare's the same?" "Must trust you with a pound or two to-day, Mr. Repton; haven't forgot how you went that day from Cracklow Gorse." "Mare fit for the job, sir?" &c. Charlie was nodding and smiling in answer to these and similar manifestations of good will, when Travers suddenly exclaimed—

"Holloa! Delpré, you here?"

"How are you, Travers? Yes, I came down to see about a horse in this part of the country; heard there was a bit of 'sporting' going on, so waited a day for it."

"Charlie, let me introduce you to a brother officer of mine—Delpré, Mr. Repton." The gentlemen bowed.

"You ride your own horse, I suppose," said Delpré; "the people round here seem very sweet on your chance—I should think they would make your mare the favourite."

"I don't know; round here you see is our own hunt, and the men of that hunt fancy either my mare or the Slasher; but this race is open to four packs, and we don't quite know what they've brought from the north of the county. Lord Farr-boro's men are always dangerous here."

"Well, you will soon be enlightened now," said Jack, "for there goes the saddling bell."

As Charlie disappeared to his toilette, Delpré said—

"You are pretty certain about this, I suppose. You're not afraid of the Slasher, are you? his party talk pretty big. Can Repton ride?"

"One of the best things out," cried the ever sanguine Jack; "Charlie's a very fair performer, and I intend to stand it for a pony. We've got the Slasher's length, and know we can beat him."

Delpré turned into 'the ring.' He had already seen Polly Perkins, and been much struck with her; 'quality all over' was his verdict. His circumstances, as we already know, were get-

ting desperate—here was a chance to recover ; what should he do ? “ She’s better class than any of the others,” he muttered ; “ she should win ; a little deeper in the hole makes no odds. If they’re quite certain they can beat the Slasher, it must be a good thing ; I’ll back it. What about Polly Perkins ? ” he inquired of a stout gentleman who was loudly vociferating “ four to one, bar one.”

“ Five to two, sir.”

“ Pshaw ! ” he exclaimed, and plunged deeper into the seething, shouting mass.

Beercroft, the wool-factor, and his friends now came in and backed the Slasher in earnest. Polly Perkins was speedily disposed from her pride of place ; three, four, and at last fives went begging. The Slasher was first favourite, and a north country horse, called the Novice, was also backed for a considerable sum. Dolpré watched the market like a hawk ; at last he considered the time had come, and closed the noisy vociferations of one book-maker, with a quiet—

“ Put me down five fifties, Polly Perkins.”

In two minutes he had backed the mare to win him close on a thousand pounds, and emerging from the crowd made his way to the door of the weighing-room. Charlie Repton and Travers coming out, passed him in the door-way, and he was about to turn with them, when a shrill, slightly stuttering voice attracted his attention, and caused him to go in.

A rosy-checked, fair-haired, blue-eyed, little man was seated in the scales, apparently in a state of great nervous agitation about his weights.

“ Oh dear me, now I’m too light ; how stupid you are, Jones ; you know we can’t afford to throw away a lb., and that other weight makes me too heavy. Try that little one—ah, that’ll do ; dear me, what a fever I’m in ; phew—I’m getting nervous before I start, run and get me a glass of sherry, Jones.”

One or two sporting lookers-on grinned considerably as the little man leisurely picked up his saddle, got out of the scales

and swallowed the sherry he had called for. Delpré followed him out to see him get up. "Where," he muttered to himself, "did I see that fellow before—and who the devil is he?"

The little man led the way towards where his horse was walking up and down—put the saddle on his back and stood sucking his whip as the groom tightened his girths and passed the surcingle across.

"What horrible weather!" he exclaimed, "to ask a man to ride in; I shall get my death of cold, or be laid up with rheumatism for the remainder of the winter. I think you said, Martin," here he appealed to one of the sporting-looking men who had followed him from the weighing house, "he was easy to ride; I'm sure if he pulls, he'll have to go where he likes, I can only just feel my fingers now," and here he gave a slight cough and glanced at Delpré.

"What's that?" inquired the latter of a bystander, and he indicated the horse.

"This, sir," answered the little man in the most plaintive tones, he was got up in 'all black,' and looked in manner and costume as if dressed for his own funeral, "is Mr. Martin's brown beast, 'The Novice.' I'm the other one; novice I mean, not beast. Nice sort of animal and nice sort of day to begin one's career as a steeple-chase rider, isn't it? So kind of Mr. Martin, wasn't it, to bring me down to ride that beast of a brougham horse through a pea-soup fog? Here, get me another glass of sherry, do, my teeth are rattling."

Neither the horse nor the day were so bad as the dyspeptic little man made out. The horse, a great slapping big brown, showed very little breeding, and looked as his petulant jockey described him, more the cut of a brougham horse than a steeple-chaser. He had, however, a lean varmint looking head, and as Delpré eyed it, he thought he might be better bred than he looked. He didn't know quite what to make of it; he knew The Novice had been backed for a good bit of money, and though the rider didn't look quite like business, the horse's

owner and his friends seemed extremely amused at his 'jeremiads' on the weather, himself, &c. Mr. Johnson was the name 'up' to ride *The Novice*, and that told nothing.

"Now, Martin, where's the fire-escape to get up by?" said the small man. "Oh, well, chuck away; but you'll never do it," he continued, as Mr. Martin, on the broad grin, advanced to give him a leg up. "By Jove, I'm here," he said, as he was thrown into the saddle. "Mind, if it isn't my neck, I'll have brandy and water as soon as you can get it down my throat, telegraph to Fergusson to come and set what's broke; none of your country doctors, mind, that's our agreement, and you're to keep me till I'm all right again."

Putting his feet in the stirrups, he leisurely gathered up the reins, and as he walked his horse out of the enclosure, Delpré heard him say with a twinkle of his eye—

"I didn't make my will. Now don't go into any litigation about the personalty in case of the worst, it's hardly worth while. Oh, dear, what weather, and what a brute it is!" and giving his horse a touch with the spur, he cantered down the course.

In vain did Delpré ask one or two of those next him who rode '*The Novice*.' Mr. Johnson, a stranger, never saw him before, was the only reply.

Now the horses come sweeping past in their preliminaries. Close upon a dozen of them altogether. A jady-looking brute called *The Rogue*, leads; then comes Polly Perkins, a lengthy low dark chestnut mare, without a speck of white about her, sweeping by with the long, low, easy stride, that looks like going all over. Great is the enthusiasm in the stand amongst the ladies as Charlie canters past. Mrs. Inglemere pronounces Polly Perkins to be a love of a mare, and vows inwardly that if ever she's Mrs. Charles Repton, she will confiscate that mare for her own riding.

"A sweet goer, isn't she, Mr. Lyttlereck?" said Laura. "Charlie ought to win—don't you think so?"

"He has a very good chance, which is as much as one should ever venture to predict of a steeple-chase," replied Tom. "Here comes his most formidable antagonist, The Slasher, on the far side in green. What's this in black, last of all? Where's the card?"

"Mr. Martin's brown horse, 'The Novice,'" read Laura.

"An ugly brute; but he moves well," said Tom. "Now they are going down to the post. Have my glasses, Miss Laura, they're very good ones, and we'll look to you for an account of the race," and as he spoke, he carefully adjusted a large pair of glasses, and handed them to the young lady.

The admirers of Polly Perkins were charmed with her when they saw her canter. They were more enthusiastic than ever, and more than one broad-shouldered farmer elbowed his way back into the ring to put just another pound on "Polly," and young Squire Repton.

"Best looking and best goer of the lot," muttered Delpré. "Hah, that little beggar in black knows how to sit a horse. Not quite his first steeple-chase, I think. Mr. Johnson ridden much?" he inquired of his neighbour.

"Johnson be dommed," was the reply; "that's Plausible Plum, the biggest gammoner out. He's fiddled more races out of the fire than any man in the North, and if he's anyway handy at the finish they may look out, for he's as full of dodges as an ould dog fox."

It may seem odd that a regular racing man like Delpré should not have recognised an apparently well known gentleman rider; but Plum, though a well-known man in the North, never went South, while Delpré never came North, except perhaps for Doncaster and the Leger, which meeting is confined entirely to professionals; but now he came to think of it he knew the name, and had heard of him as one of the shiftiest riders on the turf. It was difficult to be sure that you had quite done with 'Plausible Plum,' and Delpré recollected more than one good story of Plum's patience and acuteness in steal-

ing races. One thing he had looked at a good deal when he backed Repton's mount was, that there were no men of mark riding against him, and he didn't at all like the discovery of such a formidable adversary, and him disguised. It was too late to tell Repton now, or he would have liked to have cautioned him not to let the black jacket get too near him at the finish. "It's done now," he thought, "there's nothing left but to see it out."

The gay silk jackets cluster for a moment round the starter, the little red flag drops, and they're away. The Rogue jumps off with the lead, and leads them at a rattling pace, so much so that he soon lies a dozen lengths ahead. The Slasher comes next, and as they cross the brook at the end of the first mile, to the horror of Mrs. Inglemere, the white and blue sleeves lies last but one.

"Oh, Mr. Lyttlereck, we're beat already!" exclaimed that lady, in tones of prettiest anguish.

"Nonsense," said Laura, "they've a long way to go yet. All well over," she continued, "ah, the green, that's The Slasher, isn't it, Mr. Lyttlereck? is going up, he has taken the lead. There's something down in pink, all the others over."

No change occurred for the next mile. The Slasher went on with a strong lead, The Rogue second. Polly Perkins and The Novice lying well off. Gradually the pace began to tell. Great was the tailing ere they disappeared behind the clump of trees on the far side of the course.

"Now, Miss Laura," said Lyttlereck, "direct your glasses on the near corner of that clump of firs, and tell us what you see?"

"Nothing yet. Now I do! yes, The Slasher has rounded them."

"What next?" inquired Tom.

"Something in white; but The Slasher is a good bit ahead, and now come two others. I can't distinguish the colours—do look," and she handed the glasses to Tom.

"All right, that's Charlie lying third, the first of those two, and The Novice is just behind him. Ah! what's that?" as he spoke, Plum brought The Novice with a tremendous rush at the fence just alongside Repton. It unsteadied the mare as it was meant to do, and she jumped flurriedly but came over safe.

"Can't hold this infernal brute!" Repton heard from the rider of The Novice, as he pulled his horse back again, and Charlie sailed on without suspicion.

The Plausible one, in fact, had coolly, to use his own expression, 'reckoned up the race' in his head. According to his calculation, he could catch and beat the leading horses if he could only dispose of Polly Perkins, who he felt pretty sure had the heels of him; he therefore at once decided she must be 'put down.' He was not at all disheartened at the failure of his first attempt. He saw that rushing his horse alongside her at the last fence had made her jump very wild, and he had merely pulled back with a view to repeating the *ruse* at the next jump. Lying about four lengths off, and feeling the most perfect confidence in The Novice's jumping powers, he waited till Charlie was again steadying his horse for the leap, when with a touch of the spurs, he rushed past him at racing pace. His calculation proved correct. Polly Perkins shook her head, rushed too, in spite of all Charlie's efforts, took off too soon, and blundered into the next field. Luckily, she really was a grand jumper, and did get over, though she came on her knees and almost nose, the other side. Charlie was all but unshipped, he was on the mare's neck, but just managed to scramble back with the loss of a stirrup, as 'Polly' recovered. He set her going again; but he had lost a deal of ground, and the pace was getting good.

He was quite wide awake now to the 'Plausible's' manoeuvre but still trusted to make up his ground through the superior speed of his mare.

"I'll take deuced good care," muttered Charlie, "he don't

rush me again. If I could only recover this stirrup. Soa! gently, old lady!" Steadily, Charlie pulled the mare together over the next field. Polly was rather restless as she neared the fence, but thanks to the steady pull, got over safe, though in the ditch thereof the white jacket, with his horse dead beat, was quietly deposited.

"There's only three in it," said Tom Lyttlereck. "The Slasher's leading, Novice about three lengths behind, and Charlie nearly twenty; but he's coming up hand over hand."

Only two more fences before they jump into the race-course, and then there's nothing but the hurdles. Charlie gradually closes his gap, and as The Slasher and The Novice go neck-and-neck at the fence into the course, is only some half-dozen lengths behind. It's a sharp turn, the leading horses come at it fast. Charlie not quite so quick, and in consequence, he steals nearly a couple of lengths, the pace at which they are going having made the leaders run rather wide round the flag. And now they race up to the hurdles. The Novice on the outside clears them about half a length in front of The Slasher, while Charlie on the in, is only about a length behind him. "Polly Perkins wins! The Novice wins!" roar the crowd, as the pair came away together. Just as they reach the stand-corner, The Novice dies away. Charlie thinks it all over, stops riding. Plum steadies The Novice for a stride or two, then brings him again with a most determined rush, and before Charlie can fairly set his horse going again, flogs, spurs, and lifts him in a winner by a neck.

Another stride, and the mare's head is once more fairly in front again; but as Charlie pulls up, though not quite sure, he feels a horrid conviction that he has been just done.

Up go the numbers! Novice, 1; Polly Perkins, 2; Slasher, 3.

Won a neck; bad third. There's not much in that pithy announcement! and yet it often both sends men travelling, and stops them.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Miss Laura. "I'm ruined. Poor Charlie! oh dear, no. I can't pay, and I can't go anywhere this year. Mr. Lyttlereck, I think I shall keep stalls at fancy fairs all through the summer, and be good. I'm sure racing's wicked if you don't win!"

"An awful sell!" said Tom, and then he diverged into the usual fallacies and common places. Better luck next time, &c. The rock of 'next time' has wrecked many a goodly argosy.

Poor Charlie in the meantime was retiring to scale through a running fire of commentary. Popularity is very fleeting. The cheery salutations of half an hour ago were now changed to "Dom it, Squire, you went to sleep!" "Chucked three pun clean into the mud!" "What the devil made you gin in, mon?"

Poor Charlie's feelings were none of the pleasantest. Being beat was nothing; but being beat when he had the race in hand. Losing the game from not scoring the king, was hard. The culmination, however, was being beat by that brute in black, who had tried to put him down. Externally, he was still unruffled.

"Sorry for your money, Jack. I'm afraid I muffed it shockingly," was his placid reply, as he retired to dress again.

Poor Jack had seen too many "good things" fail, not to take one more like a philosopher. He merely replied,

"Yes, he did you, Charlie; just won it out of the fire."

"Made a little too certain, Repton," said Delpré, with a pleasant smile, as he joined them. "Couldn't catch you in time, or I meant to have told you not to let Plausible Plum near you at the finish. He's too dangerous to allow alongside."

From his easy speech you would have hardly credited the awful malediction he had bestowed on Charlie as they finished.

"Who?" said Charlie. "Why, you don't mean to say that was Plausible Plum?"

"Yes, it was; but I didn't know him by sight, and only found it out too late to tell you," and Delpré walked off to

have a look at the little man who had upset his venture. He found him chaffing over some champagne with Mr. Martin and two or three friends.

"Oh, Martin, and you said he didn't pull. Didn't you see him quite running away with me two or three times in the race? I felt quite ashamed on Mr. Repton's account—might have put his mare out at her fences. Do you know I almost think it did once;" and here the little man winked and grinned, till Delpré thought how much he should like to strangle him.

"I thought—he, he, he!" said Mr. Martin, "he was running away with you at the winning-post, and you'd never stop him;" which pleasantry again convulsed the party. It's astonishing how little it takes to make men laugh who've just won their money.

Delpré looked him well over. He made it a rule to take the picture of any one it might ever be worth his while to know again, and seldom forgot a face. If he had ever seen Plum before it must have been casually.

"Yes," he muttered; "you've done me fairly this time. I don't think I shall forget your face. If it ever is my turn to hold the cards against you, I'll play 'em out pretty religiously."

"Charlie, dear," said Laura, "I shall make you pay for my mourning. I intend to wear crape till the Hunt Steeple-chase next year, and then if you don't win, or at all events beat that man in black, I'll never forgive you. Do you hear what I say, sir?" and Laura's eyes sparkled.

"Oh! I'm so sorry, Mr. Repton. But why didn't you gallop away from them sooner?" said Mrs. Inglemere. It was a very bad shot of the widow's, but, as I said before, though her *pose* was perfect, she was a little deficient in tact. Ah! young ladies, beware how you stroke the bristles of a man's vanity the wrong way.

"That woman's becoming a bore," thought Charlie. "Never

mind the mourning, Laura. We must try and do better next year. You must back Polly once more. All right, Tom, I'll go on the box. Here's the carriage. I'm hungry for a smoke."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SMALL HOUSE AT FULHAM.

THE sun of an early spring morning glanced palely and coldly into the first floor drawing-room of a small house in Fulham. It was furnished as such places usually are, though there were various addenda which gave signs of the cultivated tastes of the dwellers therein, beyond the common run of such inmates. A piano stood in one corner, a small easel in another; volumes of classic poetry and quaint old English authors lay scattered about the tables, and some carefully tended, though rather sickly-looking plants decorated the windows. At a writing-table, covered with papers and books apparently of reference, a man sat driving his pen steadily and swiftly over the foolscap sheets, which he threw, as they were finished, on the floor by his side.

He was a slight man, with grizzled hair and careworn countenance, deeply marked with the lines Time draws, ah, so rapidly on those with whom the battle of life goes hard, and, as previously related, the world had gone at times very hard with Cis Langton. Occasionally he raised his eyes to the clock, then bent over his work again, and nothing but the scratching pen broke the silence of the apartment. He was grinding his brains in that hardest of literary occupations, producing copy against time.

Cis Langton would probably have been a leading man at either literature or the Bar, but for the melancholy incident related by Lyttlereck. This mental earthquake came and left one dreary vista, such as he shuddered to contemplate. When

men come to this, there are but two things that save them, I should perhaps have said but one, for the first would inculcate the second—I mean the consolation of religion, or work. For religion, Langton had about as much as many men of his class, that is he believed he believed. He saw that Protestants turned Roman Catholics, and *vice versâ*. He knew that there was a considerable difference in opinion as to what was the legitimate path to tread. He thought over the clergy of his acquaintance, and felt that he had seen better men who professed with their lives instead of only with their profession. Perhaps he had been unfortunate in his acquaintances that way ; he loathed the bigotry of the orators of Exeter Hall who look upon it, that they alone are in possession of the straight road to heaven. He was an intellectual man, with, I fear, nothing but conventionalism in lieu of faith. In short, in those six months after what was to him his 'life blood's death,' he was at war with mankind.

In these days he might have studied Geology, and wrought out a creed for himself, but fourteen years or so ago, we yet lacked the teaching of Darwin and Colenso.

Work might have saved him : but he had enough to live upon ; the motive was gone, and the old energy had died out of him. His saint upon earth was gone, her last words no incentive to exertion and resignation, but incoherent babble. Do you wonder that this man of the world, worldly with no religious feeling to fall back upon, felt his whole moral nature collapse, and repined at what he regarded as the injustice of the Almighty. The sins of the fathers shall be visited on their children ; was that justice—who shall say ? But it was hard to bear. He had, you see, nothing to sustain him, so he did as men will do sometimes under such circumstances—lived for excitement. Some, in these cases, take to drinking, some to gambling. He chose the latter ; like most men, utterly reckless, his career, at first starting, was marked with success. He had a shrewd head, used it almost mechanically, and cared so little whether he won

or lost, that he played and bet boldly. After a little, finding the stimulant hardly sufficient, he associated deep drinking with it. The double excitement is undoubtedly great, but the two worked badly together. Cis was no exception to the law of nature in such cases, and soon found himself stranded. For the first time since Lucy's death, I believe he felt happy, when, after losing a large sum on the Derby, he found himself with but a few hundreds left.

He gave the gayest of dinners at the 'Blue Posts,' the claret flowed like water, wished his 'friends' good-bye, as he was going to South Australia, and retired calmly to a second floor in Fulham. Here his pen travelled rapidly—stinging critiques, crackling articles, a cleverish novel, &c., brought him in money in fair quantities. He had given up the latter of his two distractions, but whenever he scraped a little money together, he threw it recklessly down on some horse he fancied. Many times did this fail, but at last his turn came, and two or three lucky coups put him in possession of some couple of thousand pounds or so. Then he left off writing, and went recklessly as of old to the betting ring, only to lose, in the course of a few months, his winnings, and come once more back to the old trade.

But literature, like everything else, is a business, and of course Magazine Editors and so on, could not trust one so volatile as Cis Langton. Though his wares always commanded a market, yet he lost the chance of a comfortable income by his constant abandonment of what was to him, to all intents and purposes, now a profession. It's the same of course in all livelihoods—doctors, barristers, soldiers, tradespeople, or ploughmen, can't throw up their callings and come back to them; consequently, when driven back by reverses, Cis Langton was often some time before he could get into satisfactory work again. On some of these occasions he supplemented his resources by giving a provincial entertainment, and it was on one of these excursions that he had so unblushingly denied his identity to Tom Lytlhereck.

"Done at last!" he exclaimed, as with a sigh of relief he threw down his pen and glanced at the clock, "with sixteen minutes to spare;" and rising from the table, he strolled to the window. There was apparently nothing very inviting in the view, for he soon turned away, and began to pace the apartment. Perhaps he mused over his wasted life, and thought bitterly how different he had once pictured it to himself. How many of us may do the same, without the excuse of Cis Langton?

A rattle of wheels, a loud ring at the bell, a quick, light step on the stair, and, like a gleam of sunshine (demonstrative sunshine, rather), a fresh-looking girl of seventeen dashes into the room, throws her arms round his neck, exclaiming—

"You, dear papa! How have you got on without me all these weeks?"

"Well, I don't know," he replied, as he looked fondly in her face, and held her in his arms. "It's been rather dull, Breezie, darling, not having your bright face to look at, when I got fagged with the pen and paper work there," and he nodded his head towards the writing-table.

"And you've had nobody to make your tea for you, and nobody to insist on being taken out for a run; nobody to make herself a nuisance, and give you a fillip by wanting all sorts of things that weren't attainable," said the girl, as she took off her bonnet, and disclosed those tumbling masses of brown hair that had so fascinated Jack Travers at King's Cross Station. "Oh! you papa, you must have 'had a lethargy' without me, I'm sure."

"Not quite, Breezie, though I am very glad to see you back again; the work kept me going, child. But how did you enjoy your visit? Were they kind to you? and did you shock them much with your harum scarum ways?"

"Now, that's not kind of you, to call my ways harum scarum!" and the young lady drew herself up, and made a most lamentable failure of looking demure. "They were very kind,

and after just the first, you know, said I was a wild girl, but it was the way I had been brought up ; and Aunt Lina said she must like me for Cis's sake. How fond they are, and how much they think of you, papa."

"Yes, I believe I was always Aunt Lina's pet nephew ; more than I deserved, I fear. She's a good old soul, and was a handsome woman in her day. How does she look now, Breezie ?"

"She's a dear old woman, and I can quite understand how handsome she must have been when she was young. Oh ! they were all so kind ; and, do you know, it ended quite—by the way, I met a prophet on my way down there !"

"A prophet ! Except the racing fraternity, I didn't know there were any extant now-a-days. What was he like, Breezie ? An elderly gentleman with a beard, and a card of the signs of the Zodiac, eh ?"

"No such thing. Pray don't laugh at me. He was very nice, and knocked off a man's hat who was rude to me at the station, and would have knocked him down too, I think, with the slightest more provocation."

"Hallo ! what's all this ? Who has dared to be rude to my little girl ? I ought not to have let you go alone."

"Oh ! never mind, papa ; he was only a rude—what do you call it ? Oh ! I know—'cad,' isn't it ? However, this gentleman came to my assistance, and saw after me and my luggage all the way to Hitchin, and was very kind to me."

"And who the deuce was he, I wonder ? However, I suppose you don't know—"

"Yes, I do, though, for I saw his name on his gun-case ; he was a Mr. Travers, of the —th Regiment."

"Travers ! Travers ! It strikes me I have seen him somewhere ; but how do you make him out a prophet, Breezie ?"

"Why, I told him I was going to stay with some relatives I had never seen ; that I was rather afraid of them, and thought I should shock them ; that I had always had my own way—"

you know I have—that I had been brought up abroad, and was afraid they would be strict with me.”

“Not a very grammatical, and altogether a most unnecessary account of yourself, child. If you are so communicative to strangers, you mustn’t travel alone any more.”

“Oh! nonsense, papa! What do you think he said? He prophesied I should be the tyrant of that family before I was there a fortnight, and implored me to be merciful; and, do you know, I did end in doing exactly as I liked, and they all did so too.”

“Don’t expect me to be surprised at that, Breezie, who have suffered under the tyranny for years,” said her father, laughing.

“Well, you know you like it, and—oh, gracious! my poor flowers! Why, I don’t believe they have been watered since I left!” and the girl made a dash at the sickly-looking plants in the window.

She was a dear girl, was Breezie Langton, with her lithe figure, tumbling masses of brown hair, sunny smiles, and honest, truthful eyes, worth a score of your regular beauties. As she said, she had been brought up almost entirely abroad, and in a queer way that would have been the ruin of some girls; but Breezie, with her honest, truthful nature, had taken no hurt. She had had a queer education, too, but was by no means deficient in accomplishments; spoke French and Italian fluently; knew something of music, and was clever with her pencil. I don’t think she had ever learnt to dance, and I know her efforts with her needle were of the feeblest.

“I hate it,” she would say, “pottering uninteresting stuff. As long as I can sew on papa’s buttons I want to do no more.”

Not a very sentimental speech, but there was no affectation of sentiment about Breezie Langton, and yet her sense of the beautiful was very great. She appreciated a fine poem, picture, or landscape. She would, I am afraid, have rather shocked society, and am quite sure society generally would have bored her. Living alone with her father, she saw few of her own sex,

and the men she met were principally literary and artists. With them Breezie could talk, and they liked to hear her young fresh ideas as she sat, almost a child, at the head of her father's table; of Cis's turf pursuits she heard but slightly. None of the slang and profligacy of the turf ever polluted her ears, nor had Cis ever introduced any of his racing associates to the presence of his daughter. Since the day he had watched the last glimmer of life flicker from the lips of his Lucy, Cis's heart had been dead to all female influence, with the exception of his daughter's. She was all he had left on earth to love, and he was devoted to her.

None of his present associates knew the melancholy past of Cis's history, or the presence of this daughter might have astonished them; but not knowing, they wondered nothing, and simply accepted things as they found them.

Langton stood fondly watching the graceful form of his daughter as she bent over the flowers, snipping off a leaf here and there, while the pale sunshine played through her rich brown hair, making a picture fair to look upon.

"And what did you do with yourself, Breezie, all the time you were at Hitchin? Was it good fun? Did you meet any girls of your own age? You so seldom see any, I should think you wouldn't know how to talk to them. Tell me about yourself," and he threw himself into an easy chair.

She tripped across the room, and seated herself on a low stool by his side.

"Ah," she said, "at first it was rather dull; I went out walking with them a little, but they are old people, you see, and were afraid of the weather, and then they walked so slow and couldn't go far. However, I had my music and my drawing. After a little I coaxed them into letting me go out alone, telling them how constantly I had to do it at home. Well, the dear old souls thought it awfully wrong or rather dangerous, fancied I should be run away with, or over, or something dreadful; but came to the conclusion it must be very dull for me, so then I

was allowed to scamper about as I liked, and went long walks by myself. Poor Aunt Susan used to be shocked sometimes at my boots and petticoats. Country roads are muddy, you know, papa, and you might as well not go out at all as to try to keep your boots clean."

Langton laughed, as he thought of his two prim old maiden aunts, who with their brother were the relations Breezie had been spending the last six weeks or so with.

"Well, but tell me about your parties, child; didn't they have anybody to dine, or take tea, or something while you were with them?"

"Oh, dear, yes; what a funny thing a good country dinner party is. We had one about a fortnight after I got there, and my aunts were in such a state. First of all what I should wear; whether I had anything good enough. Dear old things, they would have ordered me all the brown and grey silks in town, and dressed me to look about five hundred, if I would have let them; indeed, they were quite distressed because I wouldn't have a new dress, and Aunt Lina went the length at last of saying I might choose it myself, if I would promise not to be *outré* and fantastical. The idea! me *outré*, indeed! however, at last they allowed my white muslin, with ivy green trimmings, might pass muster, though it was foreign looking, and then, oh, such fun. Such dusting and uncovering of furniture, and I was banned the drawing-room for two days. Oh, and my lecture—as to how I mustn't talk music or the Continent to the archdeacon, because he was very particular, and looked upon operas and foreigners as merely the designs of the ungodly. How I was to be sure and ask the Miss Partingtons to sing. How, if I had to talk to deaf Mr. Dempsey, I must take no notice if he answered at random and evidently didn't hear what I said; and then Aunt Lina—well, she did laugh when she told me—said I mustn't lose my heart to Mr. Thompson, the curate. He's as old as you are, papa, and he wears spectacles."

"Don't be rude, Breezie. Don't you think anybody might lose their heart to me, yet?"

Breezie opened her large eyes like most boys and girls of seventeen. She looked upon her father, then barely turned forty, as quite out of the category of love-making. Children never do contemplate such an event as a surviving parent marrying again till they are near thirty themselves, and are even then apt to feel aggrieved at it, when there is no earthly cause for their being so.

"Well," she said at length, "you would want somebody very nice, and then, papa, you know, you've me."

"Very true, pet, and that's quite enough for the present; but how about your dinner party?"

"Oh, ah," she said. "Well, we were all looking our best, and the furniture too, with its brown holland clothes off. Aunt Susan and Aunt Lina in a flutter of agitation, trying to look as if they didn't expect any one, and I feeling a most uncontrollable disposition to laugh. There was a knock, and first came Mr. and the Miss Partingtons, then came deaf Mr. Dempsey, then the Archdeacon and Mr. Thompson, the curate, arrived together, and then a Mr. and Mrs. Wills completed the party. We all made conversation till dinner was ready, and I know I got on very badly with one of the Miss Partingtons. She had read nothing I had, and was full of a new novel, so pathetic, she said, and some cross stitch. The curate took me in to dinner, and asked me if I liked churches, and then whether I was interested in ferns, as there were fine specimens to be found about there in the summer. I don't know whether he meant churches or ferns, or both, but I smiled and bowed. Then Uncle Allen asked Mr. Dempsey to take wine, and he said 'He didn't agree with him,' at which uncle looked confused, the Archdeacon chuckled, and Mr. Partington remarked poor Dempsey was getting infirm. Then the Archdeacon began a tremendous story about somebody who must have been very dreadful. By-the-way, they all shook their heads, and won-

dered what next indeed ; though, as far as I could make out, the man only wanted to establish a chapel. Then Mr. Wills asked Mr. Partington if he had seen the paper, and they both came to the conclusion there was nothing in it. Here the Archdeacon chimed in again, but he didn't seem to have found anything more than they had, for he summed up with nothing in it, positively nothing, and went the length of adding, but there never is, now-a-days. Here Aunt Lina asked Mrs. Wills how her baby was ; I don't think she had spoken before, but she brightened up then, and related a moving anecdote as to how it had nearly choked with a plum-stone, or a toy-soldier, or something or other it never ought to have put in its mouth. Miss Partington had a little to say then about some fancy fair, that as you say sometimes, papa, was 'looming in the future,' and then I found myself yawning, when luckily Aunt Susan bowed to Mrs. Wills, and we all sailed off to the drawing-room. Oh, if it was dull in the dining-room, my goodness, what was it in the drawing-room ? I had to pinch myself to keep awake, and caught myself answering as much at random as poor Mr. Dempsey. Papa," said Breezie, gravely, and pushing back the heavy masses of her hair, "I don't think I care much about English society."

"Well," laughed Langton, "you can't be said to have seen it yet. You weren't likely to meet any very lively people at Hitchin, I was afraid ; but what did you do in the evening?"

"When the gentlemen came we had a little music. The Miss Partingtons did a little orchestral thunder together on the piano, and then one of them sung Longfellow's 'Bridge,' very feebly. I couldn't help thinking when she came to 'the burthen laid upon me is greater than I can bear,' that she was rather transferring it to us. Well, they asked me to sing, so I sang one of my little French songs—and they all looked, I thought, rather shocked. Aunt Lina came over and said it was very pretty, but they'd rather hear me sing something English. Do you know I felt very naughty, and had half a mind to see

what the Archdeacan would think of 'Cigars and Cognac.' Wouldn't it have astonished them? and if I'd recollected the words I really think I should. Now don't look shocked, papa, I didn't do it; I sang 'The Last Rose of Summer' instead. Well, it all came to an end at last, and just before they left they said I must sing one more song, so I sent them off with 'Up in the muirning's nac for me' instead—appropriate, wasn't it?"

"Breezie, you're a spoilt girl, and I'm afraid I mustn't let you go visiting again without me; but go and see what we can have for dinner, then get your bonnet, I want to go into town; a run will do you good, child, and if we see anything tempting in the play-bills we'll take seats for to-morrow."

"Oh, charming! that will be delightful, I know there's lots of things I want to see; I won't be a minute. By the way, where did you say you met Mr. Travers, papa?"

"I don't think I said I had met him anywhere; I only said I thought I had; but why?"

"Oh, nothing, I don't know; only I thought—I'll be back in a minute," and Breezie danced out of the room.

"Travers," muttered Cis, "Travers; where the devil did I meet a Travers? Racing somewhere, I think. Yes, by Jove, I believe that's the name of the young fellow who had such a good night at the rooms at Doncaster three years ago, and lost it all again on The Cup next day."

CHAPTER IX.

PRIVATE THEATRICALS AT RYALSTON.

FROM one country house to another, it may sound monotonous, but such after all is very much the life that idlers, like Repton and Lyttlereck, lead from the beginning of the shooting season till Easter. These idlers of society, I wonder whether

their lives are cast in quite such pleasant places as would appear—I fancy not. It is so easy to get bored in this world ; we get tired of good dinners and of good shooting even, and long for the rough fare, the hard work and the uncertain bag.

“ Labour, the symbol of man’s punishment ;
Labour, the secret of man’s happiness.”

Shooting may be made too easy. I recollect hearing a story told of a crack shot to whom the choicest of covers and ‘ warmest of corners ’ were always open, which rather bears upon this.

He was expected to shoot at a noble lord’s—the cover of the Manor had been specially kept for his edification. The head-keeper was in a state of fever to get him into the right place. He was sent forward to a corner of celebrity, while the other guns with the beaters worked slowly up to him. Pheasant after pheasant rose and went whirring off in his direction, still an ominous silence proclaimed that the rocketers were escaping their destiny. The head-keeper fidgeted, “ The gentleman must have got to the wrong corner. Bill, where did you place Mr. ——— ? ” Another half-dozen cocks whirred straight across the fatal corner, not a sign, no report, nothing but a portentous silence ! “ The gentleman’s all in the wrong place,” and the head-keeper stopped the line while he himself made the best of his way to the said corner. I should think that keeper’s face would have reduced any modern Apelles to despair, as he beheld the object of his solicitude lying flat on his back, a big cigar in his mouth, while the first sound that met his horrified ears, as the recumbent sportsman lazily levelled his gun at a rocketeer, was :

“ Oh, you brute ! how I could cut you over if it wasn’t so much trouble.”

Your idle man is always craving fresh excitement, he must have it ; but I fancy when you take in his sufferings under the reaction, the excitement being over, the workers of this world have a deal the best of it.

However, your country-house life is very pleasant, and these same idlers find it eminently adapted to their vocation. A game at billiards, a stroll about the place in pleasant society, a day's gunning, a novel in the library if the weather is bad, and we feel sulky. One's evening rubber, the cheery chaff of the smoking-room afterwards, charades or private theatricals; and this brings us to our subject, for there never was a greater devotee of the stage than Sir Thomas Lechmere of Ryalston Park.

In his younger days about town, Sir Thomas had been a steady patron of the drama. He knew all the leading actors and actresses. It was his hobby, he lived a great deal in the theatrical world, and never was so happy as when joining or giving *petit soupers* to theatrical artists. Very pleasant recollections he entertained of those joyous reunions after the successful *début* perhaps of a new piece. None of your dull, formal entertainments, but men and women both came, their work over, full of fun and spirit, determined to enjoy themselves. Good things were said, good stories were told, and when they were not quite so good, the joyous company laughed just as much. He was himself a very fair amateur, which means of course, that he would have been dear at thirty shillings a week in the profession; and when he came into the property, immediately added a small theatre to the house. For some few years the Ryalston Theatricals were celebrated. Most of the leading amateurs of the day having 'fretted their hour' on these boards. As he got on in life, Sir Thomas naturally abandoned the 'sock and buskin,' contenting himself with relating his last successes in Sir Peter Teazle, Sir Anthony Absolute, &c. The return of his eldest son from Oxford, severely smitten with stage fever, delighted him. The theatre was once more put in full swing, and though no longer taking an active part in the performance, he constituted himself a supernumerary manager, being as enthusiastic about the whole business as the youngest member of the company. The Ryalston Theatricals became once more an institution, and at Ryalston

Park are assembled most of our *dramatis personæ*, with a view to the cultivation of the drama, and to the enjoyment of a final few days at the pheasants.

A fine old house it was, standing on a hill looking patronizingly over one of the finest grass counties in England. A noble and well-wooded park surrounded it, inhabited by troops of fallow deer. Hares cantered away leisurely before you, whilst the rabbits scuttled from your approach in that state of excited bustle that seems to be their normal condition. Here an old cock pheasant was sunning himself, making the most of the pale January sun, while the next turn of the shrubbery brought you face to face with 'the monarch of the glen,' for Ryallston Park boasted a few mighty red deer, making their dapple-coated brethren look wholly despicable.

Plentiful, too, were those sly meandering walks, leading nowhere in particular ; so delightful to couples in the first summer of flirtation, so aggravating when you want to find anyone in a hurry. How perspiring footmen, with a note marked 'immediate' for the master of the house, must curse them. How one has oneself sometimes, when in hot pursuit of Jack Boldero to make up a four game at billiards, one has stumbled suddenly on Tom Soapington and Miss Flirtingale, who look up with an aggrieved expression that is hard to bear ; one feels oneself *de trop*, and they feel bound to ejaculate a few common-places before we are suffered to proceed. I wonder what proportion marriages made by design bear to those made by accident. I would back the latter to predominate. To be sure there are accidents for good as for evil, as when your leg was broken on the South Eastern, while your friend, thanks to a jibbing horse, arrived five minutes too late for the train.

Destiny, destiny ! Napoleon believed in it, and a pretty end it brought him to. So when Tom Soapington comes out of that meandering walk, and finds himself engaged to Miss Flirtingale, he wonders what his destiny has brought him to. He never meant it when he strolled out that morning. It was

all those infernal walks and the idleness of a country-house life. He smokes a cigar, and wonders how it will all work out, and the chances are remains in a sort of vacuous bewilderment till 'the happy day' at St. George's, Hanover Square. He and Mrs. Soapington get on very well afterwards ; but if you could induce Tom to tell you the truth, he would inform you that he had as much idea of matrimony as of elephant shooting in Ceylon when he entered that shrubbery. His wife, perhaps, would tell you a different story. The women know these things so much quicker than we do. But where am I getting to?—which is perhaps the remark Tom Lyttlereck might have made to himself as he strolled through the Ryalston shrubberies with Laura Clippington that fine January morning.

I don't know whether you were ever engaged in private theatricals ; but you may depend upon it, teaching a pretty girl her part is a mighty pleasant, though dangerous operation. Byron made some *à propos* remarks to female teaching in regard to languages. I don't think he would have thought it mattered much which side the teaching came from, or what the teaching was about,

"It is pleasant to be schooled in a strange tongue."

He certainly makes the condition :

"When both the teacher and the taught are young,

* * * * *

They smile so when one's right and when one's wrong."

"Now, Miss Laura," said Tom, "we had better just run this scene of ours before rehearsal. It won't take us ten minutes."

This misguided enthusiast is proposing to rehearse a love scene in a shrubbery, and thinks they can do it in ten minutes.

"Lyttlereck, Lyttlereck, where are you?" shouted young Lechmere.

"Here I am," replied Tom, angrily. "You needn't break your voice over it."

"Here's the whole rehearsal waiting for you and Miss Clippington. Do come along, we shall never get through before lunch."

"Don't be absurd, it's only just half-past eleven, and Miss Laura and I are studying hard. Just running through one or two of the most effective situations."

"Sorry to interrupt you ; but perhaps you'll come and try these effective situations a little more publicly. In my capacity of manager I ought to fine you both for being late."

"What an old despot it is," growled Tom. "We were so absorbed in study, we didn't know how time was slipping away."

"No, I don't suppose you were keeping much account of time," said Lechmere, laughing. "The drama is a very enthralling pursuit, don't you think so, Miss Laura?"

Laura coloured slightly as she replied, "Well, we must learn our words sometime. We are quite ready for you now. Don't be savage ; I've no doubt you know nothing of your own part. It's a very easy rôle to be a manager and find fault with everybody."

"You are quite right, Miss Clippington, that's about the most correct definition of a manager's business I ever heard. Here we are ! now then," he said, as they entered the theatre, "clear the stage, all ready for the first piece. Who'll hold the book ? Here, Puzzleton, you've nothing to do, just prompt, will you, like a good fellow ?"

They are wonderfully alike all these amateur rehearsals. There's the nervous man who knows every word of his part perfectly ; but can't speak two consecutive sentences without looking at his book. There's the contumacious man who, because his book says to "enter right," cannot be made to understand that the exigencies of this particular stage require him to "enter left ;" who steadily, because the stage directions lay down "speaking outside," will insist upon saying the whole sentence "outside" instead of "coming on speaking." There's

the man who has discovered some particular effect, which you cannot make him understand is quite out of character with his part. Such, for instance, as introducing a bit of low comedy business, which he has seen in a London farce, into "Charles Surface," or "Jack Absolute." There's the man without an iota of acting in him, who invariably makes a mess of the six lines entrusted to him, but is firmly persuaded he would be a great success if he had only "enough to do." The man who don't care what he plays, as long as you give him lots of gold embroidery, silk stockings, and gorgeous buckles. There's the lady who objects to being embraced—there's the gentleman afraid to do it—at all events on the stage. There's the man who never knows his part, but assures you it will be all right on the night, (cut out of your best scene or exit you feel what reliance is to be placed on such protestations). There is the lady who will dress an elderly woman as five-and-twenty, and the lady who will wear her jewels in the chamber-maid's part. There's the man who can't sing and will sing, while scarce are the men or women who can act and will rehearse sufficiently.

Still they are great fun, amateur theatricals, and the rehearsals perhaps far the best part of them. Stay, I am not sure whether the supper, when all is over, is not the real cream of the thing. When you flatter each other about how well it has all gone off—how well everyone did, and though Jones did cut two pages of dialogue there, (it was the very gist of the plot) nobody could have guessed it in front.

Great, of course, had been the discussion as to what piece they should play. Every post brought down a fresh parcel from Lacy. Travers and Forbes had been enthusiastic on burlesque, and raved of the effect of song and 'break down,' turning their conversation for the nonce into mock heroics; but this had been overruled by the majority. Comedy after comedy was rejected, because there were not enough good parts in them.

"All are Hamlets, and none are Laertes,
Pray act something with nothing but kings,
Romeo's all in tears; Beverly volunteers
Ready to fall in tears, choke up the way;
Generalissimos hunting bravissimos—
Devil a private to act in your play."

There is no diffidence amongst amateurs; the thing to consider is whether there is scope enough to develop everybody's talents. At last "The School for Scandal" was pitched upon, as dressy and affording numberless opportunities of attaining distinction.

"Now, then, stage if you please," said Lechmere. "Miss Clippington, do you mind standing at the wing?"

"No; but, Mr. Lechmere, I just wanted to ask you about my dress," said Minnie. "I needn't be an old fright if I do play Mrs. Candour—need I? I don't see why she shouldn't be a young woman if she does talk scandal."

"No, certainly. Scandal's not confined exclusively to old ladies. It's usual not to dress it too young. I wouldn't if I were you. More effective, you know, older."

"That's what Charlie keeps saying. I'm sure making oneself hideous cannot be effective!"

"No, no, I don't mean that—don't be too girlish, that's all. I'm sure your own good taste can be implicitly relied on?"

"I should think so; and I shall tell him you said so."

"Now then, are you ready? Scene second, Act II. Forbes, Travers, Mrs. Inglemere, and Lyttlereck, ready? You enter right, isn't it?"

"Yes, all right."

*"Act First, Scene One. Three robbers enter
First robber enters L, and goes to centre."*

"Now, do be quiet, Jack. Where's Forbes?"

"Here am I."

"Avenge your brother, Blazo takes the stage."

"Confound you! will you be quiet? Do attend to what

you've got to do, and let those departed extravaganzas rest in peace. Who's got the book? Oh, you have, Puzzleton; have you found the place? That's the side to prompt from."

Puzzleton, a little man in spectacles, a professor of Oxford, wholly innocent of theatricals, except in the form of Euripides, &c., nervously went to the wing and fumbled over the "Lacy's Acting Edition" which had been thrust into his hand.

"Good gracious! where is Mrs. Inglemere? Oh, I beg your pardon. Now, Repton, like a good fellow, do stop talking."

"I was only hearing Mrs. Inglemere her part. She knows nothing of it as yet."

"How can you say so, Mr. Repton! I'm quite perfect in the first four pages, only you put me out so."

"Well, please begin. You commence as Lady Sneerwell."

"Let's see, what is my first sentence?—oh, I know."

"*Lady Sneerwell*—Nay, positively, we will hear it."

"*Joseph Surface*—Oh, yes, the epigram by all means."

"*Sir Benjamin*—Oh, plague on it! uncle, 'tis mere nonsense."

And the rehearsal proceeds tolerably smoothly for some little way, when Mrs. Inglemere wants 'the word.' Puzzleton, who has been contemplating the stage with great interest, is vehemently appealed to.

"Oh, dear, yes. Wait a minute, I've lost the place. Where are they? I forgot to follow them."

"Hang it, Puzzleton! this'll never do! You shouldn't take your eye off the book."

"But they were going on so well. I thought they knew it all, so I just—"

"Exactly," interrupted Lechmere; "but you should be always thinking they don't know it, and will want 'the word' every minute. Now then, the cue, if you please, Miss Clippington—'Tries to pass for a girl of six-and-thirty.' Now, Mrs. Inglemere. 'True, and then as to her manner—'"

"Oh, yes, I know now. 'True, and then,'" &c., once more

the rehearsal runs on. By the time the luncheon-bell rings, they have got just to the end of the fourth act, in which Laura as 'Lady Teazle,' and Sir Thomas, who had been induced once more to resume his old character of 'Sir Peter,' display great spirit in the screen scene.

A little round of applause greeted Laura as they finished.

"Brayvo ! Miss Laura," said Forbes.

"Brayvo you overcomes me quite,
Now mind you do it just like that at night."

"Capital," said Lyttlereck, "you do it beautifully."

"Do you think so, really?"

"Of course he does," said Lechmere. "Look here, we must have the fifth act directly after lunch."

"Regular case of 'Blimber,'" said Repton, "gentlemen, we will resume our studies at three o'clock."

"Oh, Mr. Lechmere, I'm afraid I shall never be able to learn 'all my words,'" sighed Mrs. Inglemere.

"Yes, you will get Mr. Repton to hear you them, that's the easiest way, you will have no difficulty then."

"If Mr. Repton wouldn't mind the trouble," said the widow with a bewitching smile, and an appealing glance from her bright eyes.

"Shall only be too happy, I'm sure," said Charlie.

"Oh, thank you so much, I know I'm very stupid, but if you really wouldn't mind helping me."

"Only too glad to be of service to Mrs. Inglemere, as she well knows," said Charlie gallantly.

The widow smiled sweetly, and thought private theatricals might be pleasant after all—a fact she had been beginning to have misgivings about.

"Well, I'm sure," murmured Laura to Tom Lyttlereck. "She's beginning to play Lady Sneerwell to his Charles Sur-face with a vengeance. Entering quite into the spirit of the part, isn't she?"

Tom laughed, and said he thought Charlie could take very good care of himself.

"Charlie—yes; I don't think he'll come to harm. Mr. Lechmere, I suppose you noticed Mrs. Inglemere never gives one a correct cue."

"Well, not quite so correct as they should be, but you're all so quick, and have so much nerve, it don't much matter." Young Lechmere showed great powers of diplomacy in the management of his troop.

"I'm sure she'll never act."

"Perhaps not, Laura," said Charlie Repton, who had just returned from escorting the widow across to the dining-room. "But if she can't act, she'll look deuced handsome. If she don't pay much attention to her words she will to her dress."

"Yes, and you're responsible for her words now, Charlie. I must go and get some lunch," and Laura tripped away.

"Well, Professor," inquired Lechmere, "what do you think of it?"

"I see on the modern stage you don't employ the chorus."

"No, most *indecorous*," said Jack Travers, his head still full of extravaganzas.

"No, Professor, people are rude enough to say at times that that's all done by the prompter, however, in our case we'll hope they won't hear much of him. But come along and get some lunch, I'm sure we're all in need of support."

"Rather," said Forbes.

"Now could I drink hot grog, sing comic songs,
Or join the gay casino's mazy throngs.

"Which means I'm good for sherry and a chop."

"Do stop your balderdash, Frank," said Tom Lyttlereck.

"Sirrah," cried Forbes, striking an attitude after the manner of burlesque.

"I'd sooner mill you I hate than live humiliated."

"All right," replied Tom, laughing, "but

"Let's have some luncheon now,
And then I'm with you if you're for a row."

With which they trooped in to luncheon.

Poor Lady Lechmere was luckily used to it, or she might have been driven well nigh crazy with the theatrical chaff that buzzed around her. "Very good bit of business that of yours with the sherry." "He wants no prompter with regard to that hashed hare." "If you continue eating cake in that way you'll exit before your time," &c., mixed up with any amount of quotations from popular extravaganzas by Forbes and Travers, were flying round the table.

One word of advice, reader. If you should ever be in a house in which private theatricals are in full blast, and are not personally concerned in them, receive a letter by the morrow's post to attend your uncle's funeral, or something of like urgent necessity, and depart while the wits God hath given you yet remain.

Mrs. Inglemere alone showed thorough discretion; oblivious of the storm that raged around her, she devoted herself quietly to her chicken and her flirtation with Charlie Repton, whom she had dexterously signalled to her side on his entrance.

CHAPTER X.

A SMOKING-ROOM REVEL.

A BRIGHT cheery octagon was the smoking-room at Ryalston. The walls decorated with the heads of mighty stags; "a head of ten" was of small account in that pleasant symposium, and how many points that tremendous "monarch of the glen" above the mantel-piece counts is difficult to ascertain after dinner, and a fertile source of argument and dispute.

The room is lit by a quaint chandelier of red-deer antlers interlaced till they form a large circle. Cunningly devised tubes, almost invisible, conduct the gas till it seems to burst in little

jets from the points of the horns. On each octagonal side of the fire-place stands an apparently carved oak book-case ; but looking through the glass doors of one we see ranged in rack ten or a dozen "double barrels," and in the other driving-whips of every description, from the light tandem whip to the short argumentative flail, so efficacious in the shooting Whitechapel. Pictures of favourite hunters and clever shooting ponies hang about the walls, and a case or two of stuffed birds are on the top of the fictitious book-cases. Lounging chairs and sofas, with a couple of neat writing-tables at the far sides of the room, constitute the furniture.

The writing-tables seem at a discount just now, and the party assembled are lounging pleasantly round the fire in all the vagaries of smoking jackets and slippers that the present age so plenteously affords.

"Well," observed Tom Lyttlereck, "after blazing at pheasants to the extent we did to-day—don't interrupt, Charlie—I didn't say killing them, though considering the rocketers were none so easy, I got a fair proportion."

A loud hem from Charlie.

"What I was about to observe when so indelicately reminded of my shortcomings, was that it all conduces to intense enjoyment of the evening cigar."

"Sorry I should have been thought guilty for one moment of interrupting the enunciation of such an original discovery. Who's had time to look at the papers and see what the world in general is about?"

"Belle Brabazon's married, I see," said Lechmere ; "an old flame of yours, Charlie, isn't she?"

"Yes," was the languid response,

"The loves of our youth how in youth we adore 'em :
Nec tunc quidem veterum immemor amorum,"

under which circumstances, I must go the length of asking what particular beast she has married."

"Why that stock-broking fellow of course," chimed in Tom.

"What's his name—ah—Bartley, no end of tin. I should think upon the whole Belle's done none so badly."

"There he goes, not an atom of consideration for my outraged feelings. Tom, you're a Goth, with no fine chords in your barbarian nature. I should think upon the whole she would rather astonish Bartley. Did any one ever hear him talk, I don't mean on Change, but in society; by the way I did once hear him say, 'devilish good;' but whether he alluded to his neighbour's remark or the dry champagne I don't know, probably the latter."

"None of your scandal, Charlie. Belle will make a very good wife. Your desperate flirts tone down, and matrimony sobers your wild ones. For my part, I am not clear I wouldn't sooner marry a thorough going flirt than not. They get it over before marriage, and know all about it, see what waste of time and constitution it is, and eschew it afterwards. It's your quiet demure young ladies who kick over the traces and plunge into that

"Idle chase of hopes and fears,
Begun in folly ends in tears."

Besides, you're not an impartial judge of Bartley. He's not a bad fellow in his way."

"That's always said of an arrant beast, and when you apply for information, no one knows what is his way."

"Confound you, remain in your unbelief about Bartley, and let me—"

"Marry the biggest flirt in England," broke in Charlie. "As you like, my boy. You are too old and too obstinate for your friends to interfere with. Puzzleton, mine ancient, you have listened to the voice of the Saga, and I hope your thirst for information is appeased. Have you no light to throw on the subject, or is thy spirit oppressed with another conundrum?"

The individual thus appealed to was, as I have said before, an Oxford professor. A little, thin, slight man in spectacles, with a pale shrewd face set in mutton chop whiskers. He had been tutor to Charlie and Lechmere in their undergraduate days. Out of his university world he was innocent as a child.

He seldom left it, and when there, was always extracting the square root, pursuing something to the 'nth power, skimming the differential calculus or chuckling over conic sections. Incongruous as it may seem with his mathematical bent, he revelled in riddles of all kinds. Had an immense collection of them, and would dedicate himself to the unravelling of a new one with as much ardour as a quadratic equation, though his efforts in the latter direction were far more likely to be crowned with success. Charlie to this day swears that the quære "What two whole numbers multiplied together make five? cost him two hours severe study, in the course of which he covered a sheet of foolscap with figures, and then had to give it up." The Professor strenuously denies the latter part, and declares he found it out himself. For the rest he is a good straightforward little man, much liked by Charlie and Lechmere, and when cast so completely out of his element, as at Ryalston, an indefatigable asker of questions. In short, take him away from his University, and he is a harmless little man with a childlike curiosity, and an insatiable love of conundrums.

"No, I was not thinking of conundrums just then, though now you mention it, I can't at all make out that one Miss Clippington asked at dinner. 'Why is the Prime Minister like a boot-jack?' I suspect," continued Puzzleton with a chuckle, "that will take some working out."

"What time do we begin to-morrow, Lechmere?" inquired Tom.

"Early; sorry for you, but we can't help it. We have seven or eight miles to go over a bad road; breakfast at nine, the break at the door by a quarter to ten, sharp. It'll be eleven then before we begin to shoot—"

"It's downright awful!" groaned Charlie. "I don't mind the early closing movement, it don't affect me; but this early rising movement is a horrible innovation. It brings back the agonies of my American trip vividly to my recollection."

"What were those, Repton?" inquired Puzzleton, "I never heard of them."

"Ah! didn't I tell you? Well, if ever there was an essentially uncomfortable people, it is the Americans," replied Charlie. "If ever there was a man who appreciates his little comforts about him it's I. The consequence is my nervous system was about shattered by the end of my trip. An American knows nothing about comfort, I suppose they haven't time; they are always in such a confounded hurry to get somewhere or do something, it makes one hot and fidgety to look at them. They've never apparently time to dine. Very limited time to dress, that is the men—for the women, I should say, have time for nothing else. They all seem to have been born a little late, and to be engaged in one perpetual struggle to make up those two or three hours lost at starting. Catching everlasting express trains by the most strenuous exertions. I need scarcely add that a nation that lives in such a confounded bustle has no time to sleep.

"There's an old, obsolete maxim about 'when you are at Rome,' &c., which I persistently disregard on principle. If chance threw me among the Carribees, I don't conceive I am bound to peg away at my fellow-creatures because cannibalism is the fashion in those parts. So why should I, who had eschewed early rising and hurry all my life, change my habits because I was in America. If they hadn't time to sleep I had, and with this sentiment did I carefully lock my door in the Continental Hotel at Philadelphia just before I tumbled into bed. Next morning I was awoke from the sweetest slumber by a battery of knocks, and a strong Hibernian accent informed me through the key-hole 'that it was eight o'clock,' as if time was anything to me. I had just dozed off again, when once more

'Did boney knuckles 'gainst the panel drum,'

and what did the Pythoness want? I never saw her, but know she must have been hideous. Nothing but to shriek through the key-hole: 'Has yez towels enough?' Once more did soft slumber close my longing eyes, rudely to be dispelled by hear-

ing my door roughly tried, and the Pythonic chamber-maid explaining the phenomenon of a gentleman not being up at ten o'clock by the exclamation, 'Shure the man must be dead!'

"Hah," said Puzzleton, "I can fancy your feelings. I recollect in the old college days, morning chapel was a problem you always found it difficult to solve—quite a *pons asinorum*," and the little man chuckled.

"Silence, you reprobate! how can you have the *hardiesse* to allude to those days? Does it never cross your mind that Lechmere and I might avenge the tortures we underwent with those Greek choruses. I can't see a frog now without shuddering and thinking of Oxford and Aristophanes."

"Dear me! yes, I don't know which of us was most sick of it," replied Puzzleton. "What a relief it was when we broke off to have a turn at conic sections, or something of that sort."

"Hark at him! hark at him!" cried Charlie. "Read us something out of the paper, Tóim, or he'll set me a quadratic equation."

"Deuce of an accident on the Eastern Counties. Two people killed, eight or nine broke, and nobody to blame, of course."

"Of course there isn't!" chimed in Lechmere. "It's quite clear if I am smoking a pipe and drinking pale ale, the signals are not likely to be strictly attended to. Again, if one is kept on unnatural tension for hours, as some of those unhappy railway employés are, it's mere human nature their giving way at last, and as the Americans would say, 'Letting things slide.'"

"Talking of railway accidents," said Lyttlereck, "I can tell you a quaint story. It's an illustration of what a badly educated 'bad lot' thought of his right to exist, and also affords a curious insight into a betting man's religion. I was travelling down north two or three years ago, and a more incongruous lot never took their seats at King's Cross. There was the Bishop of —, four well-known members of the betting-ring, and myself. As soon as we started, the turfites, ever anxious, like the busy bee, 'to improve each shining hour,' whipped up one of

the cushions to form a table, produced a pack of cards, and plunged heavily into whist. I was leaning over interested in their game—the Bishop was immersed in a book.

“‘That’s a treble,’ cried one of them. ‘Lay you the odds in fives, Bill?’ when crash! a confused sensation of toppling over something, and we were all in a heap in the bottom of the carriage. We were going something like forty miles an hour, and had run into a broken-down coal train.

“Of course all was confusion, a good many people being seriously hurt; but when we had scrambled out and shook ourselves, it turned out that nobody in our compartment was damaged more than being slightly cut or bruised.

“One of these betting men had his head rather cut; he was, moreover, a good deal shook and frightened, and at that moment became conscious of the utter absence of all good in him, what a confounded villain he was, and how had he met his just deserts, he ought to have been killed.

“Taking off his hat and mopping his bleeding scalp with his pocket-handkerchief, he went up to his lordship and thus addressed him: ‘Well, sir, I suppose we may thank your being in the carriage for our fortunate escape?’

“In vain the Bishop suggested thanks were due to Providence. My turf friend walked sceptically away, and I have no doubt on a similar occasion will always follow a bishop, and bet odds on the safety of the arrangement.”

“I can’t make out that riddle of Miss Clippington’s at all,” said Puzzleton, who had been in a brown study during the whole of Tom’s story.

“Oh, something to do with the boot,” broke in Tom. “Ah, Puzzleton, how I envy you that power of concentration. It’s the grand secret of success. Don’t talk to me of talent—don’t talk to me of luck, opportunities, &c. I’ll back dogged concentration to beat them all in the long run. Look at Puzzleton there, while we are idly chaffing, his whole mind is concentrated on a conundrum. There never was a great man who

did not possess that power—Newton was a wonderful example. Every really great man has possessed it more or less, and in exact proportion to his possession of that faculty has he been more or less great. Where it exists in its highest phase, it is accompanied by the power of entirely divesting the mind of the subject in hand at will. Charlie, there, for example, has his Derby book eternally running in his head, whatever he may be engaged in. The Duke of Wellington could dine and sleep dismissing the fate of the Peninsula utterly from his thoughts. So history tells us could Alexander—”

“That’ll do, Tom. Never mind the Ancients. Besides, we all know Alexander took his liquor freely—an easy way of dismissing most things from his mind. When I’ve had my bottle of ‘Forty-four,’ it’s little my Derby book troubles me.”

“And why, Mr. Lyttlereck, shouldn’t I concentrate my faculties on a conundrum?” inquired Puzzleton, rather nettled.

“Rude in the first place,” retorted Tom, “because you ought to have been, or affected to have been, intensely interested in my little anecdote. Foolish in the second, because you wasted that valuable power on a frivolous object.”

“I don’t see it at all,” rejoined Puzzleton, getting really very angry. “Riddles are a source of amusement to me, and I suppose I may employ those powers of concentration you are kind enough to attribute to me, to their elucidation if it suits me?”

The little man was getting on his stilts, his custom when annoyed.

“Quite right,” said Lechmere. “Never mind Tom and his eccentric theories. We’ll all have a shy at the riddle immediately, and scorn the idea of bed till it’s solved. Help yourself, Tom. Forbes, there’s another cigar on the mantel-piece.”

“Thanks,” replied Forbes. “I don’t know that it is quite a case in point, and Tom must forgive my rather throwing chaff at his heroics; but there was a case decided last week—a real good Chancery suit that had run some years. An acquaintance of mine was one of the interested people. It was a dispute

about succession to an estate. My friend being poor, and thirsting for the flesh-pots, concentrated all his energies on this suit. By dint of harrying lawyers, and spending what little capital he had, he eventually got a decision, and in his favour, too. Now what do you think he came into? The estate was not large, and the legal expenses had been enormous. There, Mr. Puzzleton, is a riddle for you."

"Eh? what was it? Would you mind just putting it again?"

"Well," said Charlie, "you legal practitioners are reputed to skin your victims pretty clean. Shall we say the house, *minus* garden, out-houses, furniture, and land?"

"Not a bad shot," replied Forbes. "It was a house, and with precious little land attached. He found he had at last succeeded to the *family vault*!"

"God bless me!" said Tom. "What a very awkward place for a house-warming. Didn't ask you, Frank, to spend a few days with him, did he, at his little place in the country?"

"Well," observed Charlie, "that's curious. Would it come under the head of suicide if you qualified to take immediate possession? I suppose," he continued, meditatively, "it doesn't give him a vote for the county, does it?"

Considerable laughter and chaff followed Frank Forbes's anecdote. The Professor was still grappling with it in the light of an elaborate conundrum. Having, through the commingling of spirits and water, so common in well-regulated smoking-rooms, rather confused a head totally unaccustomed to stimulants, he had now reduced the two (that is, riddle and narrative,) to a common denominator, and might be heard lowly muttering, "Why is a Prime Minister like a family vault?"

"Ah!" said Tom, "you fellows have burlesqued my lecture on concentration before it was well begun. It's your loss, coffers that you are!"

"That's a curious marriage of Belle Brabazon's," said Lechère: "the last girl in the world whom I should have expected

to see marry a man like Bartley. I should have thought she would have flown at higher game."

"Higher game!" sneered Charlie; "he's supposed to be worth ten or twelve thousand a-year, and money rules the matrimonial market.

'Virtues are lost in interest, as rivers in the sea.'

Why don't you read your Rochefoucault, Lechmere?"

"You are very hard on Belle," exclaimed Jack Travers. "I didn't know her near as well as you did, Charlie, but thought she was as nice a girl as ever I met. Must say I'm rather surprised at her marrying Bartley, though. However, they all do it when they can, I suppose," and overpowered by the depth of this conjecture, Jack puffed vigorously at his cigar, and lapsed into silence.

Charlie Repton's feelings on the subject were those of a much aggrieved man, though upon what grounds it would have rather puzzled him to declare. He had been a favoured admirer of Miss Brabazon's for two seasons. He had often thought that he had never cared about any woman to the extent he did about her. He fancied she rather liked him. He had had hazy ideas of marrying Belle and settling down quietly. The idea of her marrying any one else had never crossed his imagination. He was an idle, indolent man, and rather shrank from giving up his clubs, his cheery bachelor life, &c. Belle's fortune was not much, and though Charlie had a very handsome allowance, it would have been a small income to set up housekeeping on, and would have left him a poor man till his father's death. With the amiable weakness of making love to every pretty woman he came across, Charlie had drifted leisurely along till the news of Belle Brabazon's marriage had aroused him to the fact, that he really had been far more in earnest than in any other of his numerous flirtations.

"Well," said Lechmere, "one can't marry without something to live upon; that, I suppose, we may lay down as an axiom.

That it's woman's mission to marry, I suppose, we may lay down as another. Ergo, Miss Brabazon's marriage is quite in accordance with the laws of nature and society. '*Quod erat demonstrandum.*' Eh, Puzzleton, isn't gratifying to see the results of an University education?"

"Thank you, no more—no, I don't smoke," jerked out Puzzleton, rousing himself from the state of coma to which unaccustomed liquids and hours, together with an unsolved conundrum, had reduced him.

"Tell you what, Professor, you had better be off to roost. Here's a candle ; you know your way."

"Oh, yes—all right. I wish I could make out why a family vault is like a—what is it? Oh—ah, yes ; I know, Prime Minister. Good-night," and with a slight ripple in his speech, a moistness in his spectacles, and a turmoil in his brain, the Professor departed.

"Tell you what, Lechmere," said Charlie, as the door closed ; "you mustn't mix the Professor's conundrums so strong. I'll look him out some easy ones to-morrow, 'When is a door not a door?' and such like. Congratulate you on quite establishing Miss Brabazon's case. There is no doubt, as you put it, that she married the right man. By the way, Tom, do you recollect another aphorism of my pet author? 'Lovers are never weary of one another, because they are always talking of themselves.' How entertaining Bartley must be on himself. I never heard him speak about anything ; but we're all diffuse on that subject. Should think Belle will have a month's pure enjoyment, any way."

He could not help harping on the marriage and sneering, though no one knew better than himself how unjustly.

Tom Lyttlereck's eyes were rather opened ; he had long fancied Charlie more seriously involved than usual in his flirtation with Miss Brabazon, and he could detect a bitterness in his tone now that confirmed him in his belief.

"Charlie, you are very hard on an old friend. When a man

after a good day's shooting talks Rochefoucault and cynicism over his liquor, it's a sure sign his liver is all wrong."

"My dear fellow, I know you hold a brief in behalf of all the flirts that ever existed, from Ninon de l'Enclos downwards. You've interested motives, man, and are enlisted under the banner of the invader."

"Bosh!" said Tom, angrily. "Hang it! take one text from your favourite: 'A man of sense finds less difficulty in submitting to a wrong-headed fellow than in attempting to set him right.'"

"Yes, I always thought a good deal of that quotation," replied Charlie, with the utmost imperturbability. "You entrench yourself strongly under cover of a great name. You see, you assume at once you are a sensible fellow, and you're addressing a fool. Yes, it's neat, and leaves you quite on the high ground."

"To the devil with your philosophy!" said Travers. "I'm sick of hearing you fellows hurl epigrammatic sentences at each other's heads. You're talking as if you were professors of a subject on which we are all children, and shall remain so, until we're soldered down. Well, Lechmere, were you satisfied with the success of the theatricals?"

"Yes, I think they went off very well. Wasn't the governor good as Sir Peter?"

"Capital! He and Laura Clippington were the stars of the evening. They brought the house down two or three times."

At this juncture the door opened. Pallid as the "Death of the Revelations," and with spectacles drawn back, appeared Puzzleton.

"Oh, dear! I'm so glad. Beg pardon, Lechmere, but I think I lost my way, and I don't know, but I think I've been asleep somewhere; and I've been all round the house, and can't find my room. It's very stupid; but will you put me straight?"

"All right, old fellow. Here, light the candles, some of you, while I turn off the chandelier. It's time we all turned in, or there will be 'occult influences' favouring the pheasants to-morrow. Come along, and we'll escort the Professor home."

CHAPTER XI.

"THE CAPTAIN" WANTED.

"BEAT, by G—!" and the exclamation came savagely from the man's lips, as after perusing his morning letters he nearly bit his pipe in two over one of them.

"They won't renew; I expected as much. I suppose they know as well as I do that the game's nearly up. Everything dead against one. Not 'a pull' that I can see likely to come anywhere, and a Derby book which makes one sick to think of. Well, this is a quiet and retired situation. I wonder how many days it will take the sharks to hit it off. 'Leave'—yes. I suppose I've a week in hand. Be that, I should think, before the ban dogs of the law are on my trail. A trip to Paris is the best thing I can think of. I'll write an application at once. I can't see what's to turn up; but when things look desperate there's nothing like 'a cut at the off chance,' it's pulled me through once or twice in my time," and Delpré smiled grimly as he thought how, when over head and ears out of his depth, he had still played on as if he had had the Bank of England at his back, and recovered himself.

Things, in fact, had been going extremely hard with the Captain of late. His speculations generally had been of a most unsatisfactory nature, and the Moretown Steeple-chase had not tended to smooth the troubled waters of his life, while, as he would have expressed it, 'the cards in his hand,' *i.e.* the bets on future events, were as bad as they could be. Duns on every side were pouring in. I don't think they much affected this easy moralist; but you must settle at Tattersall's, and when holders of bills at three months won't renew, they must be met, or the holders thereof are apt to show scant courtesy.

He was no longer quartered at Milton, but was now commanding a detachment stationed at a small country town some eighty miles from thence. The troops were quartered in an old

castle, surrounded by a fosse crossed by a slightly decrepid draw-bridge, which was occasionally raised more to see if it were practicable to do so, than for any other reason.

The castle had been a place of strength in its day. A day in which imperfect six-pounders were looked upon as formidable breaching guns, and, like all old castles one ever saw, had of course sustained a formidable siege in the time of Cromwell. Judging from tradition, those old Puritans must have enjoyed knocking their heads against stone walls, as much as their descendants of the present day do against religious polemics.

If anybody ever made his mark on the United Kingdom in letters of fire, it was Cromwell. He knew that you cannot make war any more than you can omelettes without breaking eggs. I should rather like to have seen him put down the Jamaica insurrection, and settle with Exeter Hall afterwards ; though in his days they would hardly have ventured to crow so loud. A good, healthy despotism has its advantages, it stops a deal of cant. One of our greatest writers has called this "the age of shams," and of a surety it savours much of the Lowther Arcade. It might also be called the age of cant. "Uncle Tom" never existed except in print, and I fancy a white community are justified in hanging "the oppressed African," even though he profess the Christian religion, when that doubtless pious and well-meaning individual begins to lighten his heart by perpetrating a wholesale massacre. It's charming, my philanthropic friends, to meet in England and moan over our poor black brethren ; but wait till you have had to do with that heavenly-minded savage, when things are not going quite to his liking. Men who ever had much dealing with either African or Asiatic, all know the immense importance when it comes to a struggle for supremacy between the two races of "establishing a funk," I will only say it is not done by talking.

But the subject of the "oppressed African" has drawn me into an unwarrantable digression, more especially so as I cannot fancy Delpré feeling the slightest degree interested in the

subject. Had it arisen in his day, I think he would have been rather the man for the exigency, and very Cromwellian, (if I may be allowed the word,) in his treatment of it.

"Yes," he continued, "leave's the thing. Paris and a shy at the 'Rouge et Noir.' It might turn up trumps, and things can't be much worse than they are. There's The Dancing Master, lame too, and wouldn't fetch sixty sovereigns, though he's honestly worth a couple of hundred."

It is curious the way different men take their difficulties in this world ; I am speaking more particularly of pecuniary embarrassments. The slightest involvement of that kind will destroy some men's rest, and literally unfit them for their accustomed avocations. Others live in a state of chronic embarrassment ; it no more affects them than a shower of rain, they live in an atmosphere of writs, protested bills, and attorney's letters. One large speculator I could mention, never pays anybody till legal proceedings are taken against him. He is in a large way of business, but cannot believe in any one being really in earnest about wanting his money till he receives an attorney's letter on the subject. I should fancy a writ troubles that man no more than an invitation to dinner.

Delpré was a hardened offender in this way, he had lived in his day more or less on paper, and though the uninitiated may think a bill at three months the immediate precursor of "gone to the dogs," I have known men last years on what must be called the most precarious income. Ruin certainly is apt to come at last ; but it's wonderful how long some of them prolong their death agony.

Delpré's musings were here interrupted by his servant.

"Beg pardon, sir, but here's a person wants to see you."

"What the deuce do you mean by a person. Is it a man or a woman, a gentleman or a horse-dealer, a dun or the devil?" inquired Delpré.

"Don't know, sir ; he looks a bit like horses, said it was all

right, you'd see him fast enough soon as I'd 'give you the office.'"

"All right, show him up, Tom, and let's see what he's made of."

Tom disappeared, and in another minute ushered into the apartment a sleek, well-shaven man, with tightish trousers and a very shiny hat. Putting his hat on the floor, and extracting a cotton bandanna from the crown thereof, the sleek man mopped his brow, and remarked "Service, Capting."

"Well, what's your news—who sent you here? never saw your face before. Do you come from Davidson?" broke in Delpré.

"Not egsactly; I remarked 'service, Capting,' don't get angry at the joke; but here's a little bit of parchment for three-fifty and costs. 'Balls and Gregson's' little affair; mere matter of form, I know, says Mr. Balls to me just afore I started; so, Capting, I must just call you my prisoner for five minutes while you gets the cash out of the strong box to settle," and the man handed Delpré a villainous strip of parchment.

As Mr. Dobbs, the gentleman in question, said: "I allays goes through all the forms of politeness when I've to deal with a swell. It soothes his feelings to make believe you think he keeps piles of bank-notes in his pockets, sofy-cushions or portmantles, and 'as merely forgotten this little affair. Course they never do settle, but they tips handsum for politeness, they does as a rule."

"D—— it! sir," said Delpré, "did it ever occur to you, you might be chucked down the stairs you have just mounted; that there's a pump in the barracks and plenty of men to put you under it?"

"Now, now, Capting," said Mr. Dobbs, "what good 'ud that do; you must know better than to rile up at your time of life; there's no good in that, it's only the very green 'uns kicks over the traces that way. So let's square it at once and have done

with it, and if you says Dobbs, which my name is, rinse your mouth out while I get the blunt out of the little top drawer, where I keeps it along with the diamonds and other jewelery, why it's more like what I'd expect from a real gentleman like yourself."

Delpré recovered his temper and presence of mind in a second.

"All right," he said, laughing. "You shall have something to wet your whistle within a moment, Dobbs; but supposing the little top drawer isn't quite so full now as it ought to be."

"Sorry for it, Capting; but you know there's only one alternative. You'll have to come along with me."

"Then I'm afraid, my friend, that'll be about the size of it; however, you shall have something to drink while I dress. I can't start in a smoking-jacket and slippers, and must have a few things put up in a portmanteau."

"Very good, sir, anything in reason; I'm sure I don't want to interfere with a gentleman more than I'm obliged. 'Sure you, Capting, I've quite a name in the profession for doing the correct thing. When they wants things made easy, they allays says, send for Dobbs, he hasn't his ekal at making a genteel caption; in fact, the ladies, widows as has gone a bit too fast, and such like, is quite my line."

"All right," said Delpré laughing, "and now I must holloa for my servant."

"'Scuse me," said the cautious Dobbs, stepping quickly between Delpré and the door, "I'll do that; nice young man he is, very. What name shall I say?"

"Call Tom."

And Tom, the bailiff roared in sonorous tones down the passage. That servitor quickly appeared; he was a sharpish servant, but had at present no inkling of the case. He was accustomed, as before said, to see his master receive all sorts of strange visitors, and the present one's vocation had not entered

his head, or he never would have reached Delpré's apartment—for the British soldier is intuitively inimical to the species, and right or wrong, will stand by his own officers.

"What will you have, Dobbs ; brandy and water, eh ?"

That worthy expressed his opinion, that "that was as wholesome a beverage as he knowed on," and Tom was accordingly ordered to produce it.

"Now, Tom," continued Delpré, "come in here, I want you to pack up a few things, as I am going away to-night—"

"Beg parding, Capting," said Dobbs, "but I should like to look at that room."

Tom stared ; but Dobbs followed them into the inner room, which formed Delpré's sleeping apartment. A glance convinced him it had no other exit, and another at the window showed it was a good twenty feet from the ground.

"All right, Capting, I'll just have a little brandy and water, and a draw of a pipe, if you don't object, while you rig yourself out. You'll 'scuse my looking in, but business is business, you know."

"Quite right ; lay those shirts out on the bed, Tom," and Delpré followed the bailiff back into the sitting-room. "Here's some baccy I think you'll find not bad, help yourself ; I won't be twenty minutes."

"All right, I shall do very well. Don't you hurry, I hate flustering a gentleman ; there's plenty of time. No use being anxious to 'get in,' is there?" and Mr. Dobbs chuckled.

Delpré turned back into the bed-room ; as he entered it he looked meaningly at his servant, and laid his finger on his lip, then jerking his head in the direction of the sitting-room, he whispered, "bailiff," pointing to the window, he muttered "ladder ;" then raising his voice, he said—

"Why, those are not the boots I want. You took them down this morning to clean. Run and get them, and look sharp." Tom gave his master an intelligent grin, and vanished.

Delpré having put on some boots, again lounged into the

sitting-room, and hoped Mr. Dobbs was comfortable, crossed to a chest of drawers, and unlocking one took out some gold and notes.

"Not quite enough for 'Ball and Gregson,'" said the Captain, pleasantly, "but it may oil the wheels of life for you and me, Dobbs; here's a couple of sovereigns just to cover incidental expenses as we go along."

"Thankee, Capting, I knowed you were quite the gentleman from the first."

Delpré lounged back again into the bedroom, whistling a popular melody, placed a light overcoat on the bed, filled a cigar-case, washed his hands with a good deal of ostentatious noise, lit a cigar, and strolled back to the sitting-room in his shirt sleeves.

"Come, Dobbs, my friend, have another glass of brandy; it's no use leaving temptation in the way of servants, so don't spare it. I may be a few days before I'm back, you know. The greatest capitalists can't raise money at times. I think I'll have a glass myself," and as he spoke, he mixed a stiff glass of brandy and water, and pushed the bottle across to Dobbs. That gentleman, nothing loath, replenished his glass immediately; it would have taken a good deal of spirits to have much effect on his seasoned head.

"You're quite right, Capting. Lord! nobody ought to know more about the difficulties of raising money than I do. It's extraordinary the number of gentlemen that travels home along with me. It's allays going to be all right with 'em in a few days; but I suppose 'that city' which they all seems to look to for 'the blunt' don't part none so easy—leastways, when they're down in their luck and talks of commoonicating with their friends, I finds they comes out quicker than when they talks chirpy-like, and of getting the dibs from the city. Means no offence, Capting, but if you've any friends, who'll stump, don't you muddle your brains about the city."

"Quite right, Dobbs; and as Timbuctoo Railway Shares are

rather at a discount just now, I'll follow your advice," and he again turned into the bed-room.

As he did so, a slight grating noise under the window caught his ear. Stamping violently on the floor, he loudly anathematised his boots. "Curse the things! I can't go in these—they'll cut my feet to ribbons. Where the deuce is the boot-jack? Do you see it there, Dobbs?" and he again looked into the sitting-room. "Oh, all right, here it is," and he disappeared back again. To throw an overcoat out of the window to his servant below; to slip on a hat and morning coat, still whistling all the time, was the work of an instant; then stepping over the sill of the window, he rapidly descended the ladder placed against it.

"Take the ladder away—quick, Tom!" said Delpré, as he arrived at the bottom. "No maltreatment of the bailiff, mind! I've done him this time. Send the portmanteau to Captain Smith, Limmer's Hotel, Conduit Street, by the night mail. Express goes at 2.30, don't it?"

"Yes, sir; all right about the portmanteau."

"That'll do; leave that bailiff alone mind—he's going to spend two or three hours with you," and Delpré walked across the little barrack square, laughing.

On arriving at the guard-house, situated at the fort extremity of the drawbridge, Delpré shouted for the sergeant of the guard. Looking at his watch, which pointed to half-past one, as that functionary made his appearance, he said—

"Tumble out your men, sergeant, to raise the bridge, and look sharp."

"Yes, sir. Guard, turn out to raise the bridge."

They were pretty smart, still it took a minute or two.

"All ready?" inquired Delpré.

"All ready, sir," was the response.

"Good—then the moment I have crossed, raise the bridge, and mind it's not to be lowered for man, woman, or child, to come either in or go out till three o'clock, under any pretext

whatever. My servant to have a pass from then till midnight. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Good. Sharp with it then the moment I'm across," and Delpré walked rapidly over the bridge.

We must return now to our friend Mr. Dobbs, whom we left smoking his pipe and sipping his brandy and water. It was a soothing process, and for two or three minutes he smoked dreamily on; but the portentous silence of the inner chamber soon attracted his attention, and produced the hazy inquiry, for he was still far from suspecting anything, of, "Halloa, Captiving! are you 'most ready?"

Not a word, not a noise; and when the repetition of the above inquiry elicited no response, Dobbs was on his legs and wide awake in an instant. He dashed into the room, rushed to the window; the ladder which, though removed, still lay below, revealed the whole thing at a glance.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Mr. Dobbs. "Holed, crabbed and bonneted! I didn't think there were a man out could have done it! Calls hisself a gentleman, does he?" and Mr. Dobbs dashing through the next room, snatched up his hat and rushed down the stairs.

It was very trying for him. As he gained the barrack-square, scarce a hundred yards across, Delpré had just gained the far side of the fosse. Mr. Dobbs, though thickish in the wind, ran his best, but as he neared the bridge it began slowly to rise.

"Stop! stop!" he gasped, "in the name of the law I order you to stop," and he dashed on to the still rising bridge. It was all in vain—there was nothing for it but to come back.

"Lower the bridge this minute!" he exclaimed. "I'm a sheriff's officer, and that's my prisoner. Does you know what you're doing of, impeding an officer in the execution of his duty?"

"Sorry," said the sergeant, grinning, for by this time, thanks to Tom, the whole guard had smoked the trick; "but the Cap-

tain's orders are positive. Can't lower the bridge till three o'clock for any one."

"And the express goes at two and a half! Why, he'll be half way to London by that. Do you know what you're doing? You're compounding a felony. You're interfering with the Lord Chancellor; you're upsetting the Queen's prerogative! 'Taint certain it's not a hanging matter. Lower the bridge, I tell you, in the name of the law!"

"Beg pardon, but orders are orders; the Captain's our commanding officer, and he says the bridge is not to be lowered till three."

"But do you know what the consequences 'll be? You'll be tried, sentenced, and found guilty," screamed the excited Dobbs.

"Can't help it, bound to be tried for disobedience of orders, and I suppose the Captain 'll see us through the other."

Delpré had stood on the far side of the bridge, watching with much amusement the altercation between Dobbs and his sergeant.

"Bye, bye, Dobbs," he exclaimed. "You've only an hour and a half to wait. A mere nothing to a man who has seen as much of detention as you have. You'll find a fairish Fives Court, and any of them will show you the way to the canteen. As you said yourself, 'I've seen many gentlemen disappointed about coming out,' though an old hand like you should have known better. Stick to your text, 'write to your friends at once, and don't trust to anything turning up in the city,'" with which, Delpré turned on his heel and walked leisurely off to the railway station.

Dobbs's face was a picture; his man had evidently slipped him, and he was undoubtedly there till three.

"Done," he said, "brown; broiled mushrooms ain't a circumstance to it. This here's a pretty go to happen to a man as is reckoned about the top of his profession. 'Mind your eye, Dobbs,' says Mr. Balls to me just afore I started; 'the Cap-ting's a very wide awake 'un.' 'Trust me, Mr. Balls,' says I;

'never fear. He ain't a going to pull the wool over my eyes with all my experience,' and here I am. Took it so free and easy, too. Well, if ever the double was fairly put on Bill Dobbs since he first served a writ, it's done this here arternoon. Smartish man, the Captin, eh, sergeant? Well, as the good books say, 'it's no use a never repining,' though how Bill Dobbs is to face the talent of Cursitor Street, in which he's been an oracle these many years, after this here, licks me entirely. Howsomever, if there's any one here 'll play skittles, I'm on, and 'll stand a gallon of beer into the bargain."

The grinning soldiers applauded Mr. Dobbs's sentiments. They were chuckling immensely over the way in which the bailiff had been done; and, moreover, what British soldier could withstand the charm of unlimited beer, garnished by unlimited skittles? In this, as far as concerned gratuitous beer, they were destined to be deceived, rather, for Mr. Dobbs proved himself a mighty professor of the game, "taking floors" and dropping single ones in a manner that rather astonished the military.

Delpré lounged leisurely to the station, and departed by the express for town; telegraphed for leave, and crossed to the Continent, pending his arrangements for selling out, and the *Gazette* about a month afterwards reported him as no longer belonging to Her Majesty's Service.

Dobbs, over his evening pipe, still relates how the Captain 'diddled him,' as he expresses it, and "such a civil spoken 'un, too; why, he just sucked me in like a baby, he did."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PARK.

It is the height of the London season. The weather is behaving in a way that the most devoted Londoner cannot but admit to be disgraceful. Still "the Row" is crowded, and the carriages on the other side move in endless procession. All the world is in town, those whom everybody knows, and those who know everybody; those whom nobody knows, and who look less likely than ever, ever to know anybody. You know the class I mean. Men chiefly who get themselves up regardless of expense, are always seen walking by themselves, to whom nobody bows, and who have a general expression of having lost something. They "do the Park," because they think it right; but would infinitely prefer the Edgeware Road in a shooting jacket. Helots of fashion, whom fashion regards not; but they have their end, and make great custom for the glove-makers and *bouquetières*. The Park to them consists of "new kids," and a flower in their button-holes.

There are those rolling in wealth and those rolling in debt, the latter infinitely the best dressed of the two. It's a mere matter of calculation, and the latter know well what the consequences of a bad hat might be to them. Credit is a great institution, and the less you have of it the more tenderly it must be treated; then, if ever, is the time to be solicitous about appearances. In old times one had no belief in a country banker who had not a good house, and a solid-looking carriage with heavy horses and harness. We have changed all that, and now affect joint stock companies; but alas! they are none the safer.

"There's a turn in the wheel yet," as a friend of mine once remarked. "It's never all over till after the Derby," and the day of which I am writing is the Monday before Epsom.

I am speaking, too, of days gone by, when "morning parks"

were not so much in vogue ; when, as Lamb would say, "we laid in bed and digested our dreams ;" when we smoked fur-tively, and moustaches stamped you either a dragoon or a card-sharper. Moustaches are not the faintest clue to a man's occupation now-a-days, and "the Row" steams with tobacco like a Turkish divan. Still, even in those days energetic people rode in the morning, and were amply repaid for the effort. As Charlie Repton said, "It ought to be good for one, it's so devilish unpleasant."

The remark was made in the days of his devotion to Belle Brabazon, though I need scarcely observe, not to that young lady.

friends will be that day week. Men whose ability you perhaps doubt to weather the Epsom hurricane, are there again, smiling as ever ; while others, whom you never suspected of speculating, you hear have been overwhelmed, and for a time England knows them no more. In the fierce rush of the London stream, few mark where the swimmer goes down. It is not many who make splash enough to call general attention thereto. The current remark in the Park on that day was, "What horrid weather !" and "What are they doing at Tattersall's ?"

With their hats jammed well down on their heads, Charlie Repton and Travers made their way through the throng. Charlie's hat went off a good many times in their progress, for his fair acquaintances were numerous, and produced the most plaintive means thereon from that injured innocent.

"On my honour, Jack, women ought not to expect one to bear such infernal weather. They don't know the trouble it takes, jamming one's hat on again 'a windy day like this. It's enough to cut one in two."

"By Jove ! Charlie, look here ; do you see who's coming ?" and Travers called his attention to a low pony phaeton, drawn by a pair of extremely handsome ponies, which, driven by a

lady, was proceeding at a foot's pace next the rails. The driver, a very fashionably dressed and extremely handsome woman, was evidently well known, and bent her graceful head in reply to the many raised hats that greeted her progress. More than once she stopped to exchange a few words with one or another of her acquaintances.

"Oh, yes—Belle. I heard she was back. I must find out where they're located, and drop a card," said Charlie, carelessly ; but for all that his quick eye had caught sight of the low carriage and its driver half a minute before Travers spoke, and he knew perfectly well what house Bartley had taken for the season.

As they raised their hats, Charlie felt his arm suddenly gripped as Travers muttered : "Stop and speak ; I'll tell you why afterwards."

Thus adjured, Charlie slipped through the rails, and the fair charioteer smiled a welcome to him.

"How do you do, Mrs. Bartley ? Delighted to see you back again. I suppose I ought to congratulate you, though it's rather late ; but I've not had an opportunity of doing so before."

"On my marriage ?" said Belle. "Thanks ;" and her eye flashed. She felt that it was almost sneering at her sacrifice that he should dare to congratulate her on it. "I hope you will come and see us now that we are settled for the season. How do you do, Mr. Travers ?"

The reason of Jack's anxiety to stop the carriage was not to congratulate Mrs. Bartley on her marriage, but she had a companion with her, and Jack had suddenly recognised in the heavy masses of brown hair that the little bonnet vainly attempted to cover, and in the sunny smile, "the Lady of King's Cross."

A saucy little nod recognised Jack, as he approached the carriage and expressed his delight at seeing her in town.

"Ah, Mr. Travers," she said, "you were quite a prophet. I

shall be afraid to talk to you in future ; you're quite gifted with second sight."

"Delighted to hear I possess such gifts," said Jack ; "but may I ask in what way my predictions have been realized ?"

"You know when we met, you said I should have quite my own way with my uncle and aunts, where I was going, you know. It's very odd, but I did ;" and Breezie broke out into the merriest of laughs imaginable.

"I can't say I take much credit for my predictions on that point. Are you in town for long ?"

"Well, I don't know ; at present Mrs. Bartley is taking care of me, and she never allows me to have my own way."

"You little story-teller," retorted Belle. "I'm sure you tyrannize over the whole establishment. Well, I must not stop the string any longer. I shall expect you both to pay your *devoirs* in Grosvenor Square. Good-bye," and the carriage moved on.

"Why, Breezie !" exclaimed Mrs. Bartley. "Where on earth did you meet Mr. Travers ? I thought you didn't know a soul in London."

"I don't think I do many ; but Mr. Travers is my knight-errant. Shall I tell you how he couched lance in rest for a distressed damsel, and how the lady was nearly rewarding him by giving him permission to wear her colours in his helm, but . . ."

"When and where did Mr. Travers ever play knight-errant to you ?"

"Yes, and when I tell you, I suppose I shall be lectured for impropriety and told, as papa said when he heard it, that I mustn't go about any more by myself. No, Belle, you won't tease me about it, will you ? I'll tell you how it was," and Breezie related her adventure at King's Cross.

"Rather agree with your father, Breezie dear. We mustn't have you wandering about the country and picking up cham-

pions in this sort of way. Champions turn out admirers, my dear, and we are very apt to be grateful to men who help us out of a difficulty when they are much worse looking than Mr. Travers. Do you know I think he looked as if he half expected leave to serve under your banner, in consideration of former services already."

"Don't be absurd, and do mind where you're driving to. You've woke up a park-keeper, poor fellow, by nearly going over his toes. Let's go home and have some tea. It's getting so cold."

They turned out of the Park, and made their way to Grosvenor Square in search of that feminine panacea, though for the matter of that the male sex take it equally kindly between five and six when they get an opportunity.

I must here endeavour to give a slight sketch of Belle Bartley née Brabazon. Picture to yourself a tall handsome woman of about five-and-twenty with dark hair and an almost perfect figure. Her features were almost too regular, too statuesque, but were redeemed by a most lustrous and expressive pair of grey eyes, pencilled over with most perfectly marked eyebrows. Their usual expression was tinged with a sort of charming humid languor that her adorers raved about; but those who had seen their owner roused, knew how those grey eyes could lighten on occasion. She had appeared rather late in London, not indeed till about one-and-twenty, when the death of her mother threw her under the protection of an old aunt—a thorough London stager. Previously to this she had resided in the country, where they had removed on the death of Mr. Brabazon, which had taken place some five years before. Her intimacy with Breezie Langton is easily explained. In those bright joyous days when Cis Langton had the world before him and something to work for, there was no house in London where he was more intimate than the Brabazons'. Mr. Brabazon held a good appointment under Government, and Cis was quite the *ami de la maison*. Belle was an only child, and from

the time she was six or seven years old had looked upon Cis as a sort of elder brother ; in fact, I believe in the beginning of their intimacy she contemplated a far warmer tie, and solemnly announced her intention of marrying him as soon as she was big enough. However, Cis was her special favourite, he constantly took her off to see pantomimes when she was a little girl, and as she grew older she knew his was the strongest interest she could bring to bear, to extricate herself from the clutches of her governess for an evening with Crisi and Mario. Cis was the *confidante* of most of her girlish scrapes.

When Cis broke with his old associates generally, and entered upon his wild career, the Brabazons' was perhaps nearly the only house he kept up his intimacy with. They were always glad to see him, and neither bored him with advice nor alluded to his reckless escapades. They knew of his bitter sorrow, and Mrs. Brabazon, a really good woman and a clever one to boot, though she secretly sorrowed over a bright career so fearfully marred, felt that the wound would bear no touching. With true womanly sympathy she tried to make her house pleasant to the stricken man. Through the midst of those wild reckless days, the few pure hours Cis passed were in that house petting and spoiling Belle. No wonder Belle's heart warmed when Cis presented her some twelve months back to his young and motherless daughter, and the two had been fast friends ever since. It's true Belle expressed great surprise that she had never heard of his marriage before, and had puzzled her pretty head a good deal over it since. Langton had briefly said in answer to her surprise, that Breezie's mother had been dead many years, that it was one of the most painful events of his life, and one he could never bear to allude to.

Poor Belle, hers was one of hundreds of town marriages. Her father's had been principally life income, the slight pension her mother had received of course died with her, and Belle, when she arrived at her aunt's, had but a scanty fortune she could call her own. The old lady was kind to her, and at first

extremely proud of her. The worldly old woman knew well the difference of Mrs. Delamere *per se*, and Mrs. Delamere with one of the handsomest girls in London to chaperone. She was not out in her calculations. Belle was rather the rage. She was not only handsome, but could talk. They do not always go together, as in common justice they should not. Some women are only made for ornament—

“The pretty things look wise, and think they’re thinking.”

is the extent of their intellectual powers. Your beauties are apt to bore one in a quadrille if you repeat it often. Valsing is another thing if you can valse, and *stay*, there is no need of conversational powers.

Mrs. Delamere felt at first immensely proud of her niece, though she after all regarded her something in the light of an appanage, handsome, useful, and creditable in a proprietary point of view. It enabled her to put her rouged wrinkled old face, and to wag her wicked old tongue in houses that had previously regarded her as a *bête noir*, and as much to be avoided as the country in spring time. She prosecuted her raids at whist in a more extensive field, thanks to Belle’s handsome face and popularity.

Then came the old pitiful story. Mrs. Delamere’s friends and compeers wagged their sagacious old heads, and opined it was quite time Belle was established. Offers, and good ones too, she had, but Belle was foolish enough (I am quite ashamed of her as I write it) to think a little liking for the man as well as his establishment necessary. Mrs. Delamere’s coterie could see no good in Belle’s flirting so with young Mr. Repton, who every one knew was in no position to marry, or, indeed, likely to be a marrying man.

It was the old story. Mrs. Delamere’s ambition was roused to see her niece properly established. The moral screw was put on, and Belle went through a course of what is best described

by the homely term, 'being knagged at.' Many a woman could explain that process if she liked. The perpetual drop we know wears away the stone; but perpetual knagging is a much quicker process. It bites through the nerves and feelings as nitric acid does the flesh.

Charlie Repton alone of her many admirers had ever touched Belle's heart. He had not spoken, and after a quarrel with him towards the end of last season, comprised as such quarrels often are of some injustice on his side, and haughty indignation on hers, Belle from sheer weariness yielded to the moral pressure, and took the most eligible admirer that happened just then to be on her list—the wealthy stock-broker.

We don't shut our daughters up now-a-days, but by judicious torture of the nervous system we can make them only wish we did. But we have followed the pony carriage quite up to Grosvenor Square, and it's high time to look back at the Park again.

"Now, Jack," said Repton, as they continued their walk, "perhaps you will tell me why you were so extremely urgent that I should stop Mrs. Bartley; no, I don't mean that exactly, because, of course, I know, but perhaps you will tell me who this lady was that possessed such powerful attractions."

"There you beat me. Of course that was why I wanted you to stop and speak; but as for who the girl is, I know no more than you do."

"But hang it all, you know her; where did you meet her? for even if your common assurance induced you to speak to her without an introduction, she would not have answered you in the way she did."

"No, Charlie, I have met her before, though I don't know her name; I met her travelling down to your place at the time of the steeple-chase," and Jack recounted as much as he thought good of his railway adventure.

"And you've no idea who she is; she's a nice-looking girl."

"No ; but as she said she was staying with Mrs. Bartley, a call there to-morrow will, I conclude, enlighten me."

"Halloa, Jack ! you seem in earnest. You can't go to-morrow, it's the first day of Epsom, and we're bound to go and see the Woodcotes run. No fellow ever got married in the Derby week, I'll take odds ; it isn't legal."

"Don't talk bosh ! here comes Delpré ; he don't look particularly happy, but he can tell us what's doing down there," and Jack jerked his head in the direction of Tattersall's.

"How do, Repton ? how are you, Travers ? filthy weather, isn't it ? Surprises me there's any one here such a day."

"What's doing below ?" inquired Repton.

"Plenty of layers against the Two Thousand winner said to be a little off, and Danebury's putting down the pieces in earnest ; but the race looks to me pretty open, and I fancy there'll be wry faces this day week to a great extent."

"In short," said Charlie, "you think the prophets will be all out this time ?"

"Shouldn't wonder at all ; they generally are. One might apply a remark of Curran's to that race. 'That they assume knowledge in proportion to their ignorance, and think they are deep when they are merely perplexed.'"

"Good," said Charlie in his usual languid manner, "then you won't attempt to elucidate the Epsom mystery."

"My dear Repton, I never affect to elucidate mysteries for anyone ; my mission at present is simply to bet against anyone solving them ; besides," he continued in a rather patronizing way, which set Charlie's teeth on edge, "I can give you no better advice than to listen to nothing you're told. You will at least have the satisfaction of losing your money in your own way. It's more satisfactory to back 'a dead un' of one's own."

"Bye-bye," remarked Charlie, as Delpré quitted them.

"Don't call him my friend ; for the rest it's now his voca-

tion. Missionaries talk missions, and racing men racing, I suppose."

"You are right," said Charlie, "how we do bore our fellow-creatures with our own peculiar interests in this world, I suppose it's human nature. How often we inflict hunting on the women, and how the pretty hypocrites bear it, and on the extreme verge of yawning pretend to be interested in our narration of that five-and-forty minutes over Asgarby pastures. A sort of relation that almost makes a fox-hunter sick unless he happens to know the ground.

"Do you know, Jack, on the whole," he continued after a short pause, "they're more merciful to us in that way. They don't go the lengths about their croquet, balls, archery, or whatever it may be, that we do about our field sports."

"I suppose," said Jack, "they consider it a duty to listen to us lords of the creation," and even as he spoke, he wondered whether there was a woman of his acquaintance he dared say so to. Indeed, I'm not sure he did not glance furtively round to make sure that no stranger of the sex overheard such a heterodoxical proposition.

"Jack, my son, welcome to the abode of civilization and art," said a voice behind him. "From what particular depths of provincial obscurity you have sprung it's not worth while to inquire. You show a sense of your deficiencies, by braving Arctic weather to join in the Epsom carnival."

The speaker was Coningsby Clarke.

"How are you, Coningsby? Why, I thought you were in Ireland."

"So I am when I'm at home; but I've just run over for a little to see what London's doing, and have been here about a fortnight."

"Well, what's going on? I only got here on Saturday."

"My dear fellow, how can anything be going on such horrible weather? We all feel like flowers that have come out too early, or butterflies that have mistaken the season. The best

thing you could have done, would have been to have staid in bed in the country. How you fellows must sleep this sort of weather down at Milton. I quite envy you your opportunities."

"Don't be a fool, Coningsby!"

"What your relations always say when you decline to do something particularly disagreeable. The Epsom mania has set in just now, and nobody can speak three consecutive sentences without introducing the Derby. Best story we've had at the Thermopolium lately was about old Floyd. Do you know him? man they call Gaffer Floyd—he's rather a roughish lot to talk to. A great fellow for shooting, and the most confounded poacher out. Well, he had some place in Scotland last year, and of course 'the Gaffer's' propensities prompted him as birds got scarce on his own ground to try how they were on his neighbour's. The neighbouring ground was pretty well looked after, and he was remonstrated with. Of course he apologized—'the Gaffer' would always do that, after shooting a cock-pheasant under your dining-room windows, at the same time spinning some marvellous yarn about how such a mistake had happened. Still sport continued so bad on his ground that he couldn't keep off his neighbour's. He was a crafty card, and difficult to catch; but at last the adjoining keepers summoned him—the case hardly seemed quite clear. He had a sharp attorney defending him, and it was rather a question of identity. 'The Gaffer' perpetrated all sorts of disguises in his marauding expeditions.

" 'Well,' said the attorney, in cross-examination of the keeper, 'you say you are quite sure it was Mr. Floyd. How did you know him?'

" 'I knew him by his dogs,' said the keeper.

" 'If you did I'm d——d!' chimed in 'the Gaffer,' 'for *they were painted* last time I went there!'

"Magistrates convulsed, and 'the Gaffer' fined heavily in spite of his remonstrances."

"Good-bye," continued Coningsby. "See you again in the course of the evening, I suppose."

"Rum fellow," said Jack. "I vote we cut this," and the two sauntered out of the Park.

They strolled up Piccadilly in silence, each was thinking of the pony-phæton, though not quite in the same way.

"Well, good-bye, Charlie," said Travers, as they arrived at the corner of Bond Street. "I'm not certain about going down to-morrow. If I do I'll call for you at eleven, but don't wait."

"Bosh! my good fellow, you'll find Grosvenor Square where it is for the rest of the season. The nameless young woman's not going away so suddenly as all that. Breakfast with me at my rooms to-morrow at half-past ten."

"Well, if I can; but don't wait," and Jack dashed off. "Yes," he thought, "I don't think I'll throw a chance away till at all events I know who she is; and as for Master Charlie, his

"Nec tunc quidem veterum immemor amorum,"

I shouldn't wonder might be put in a good deal stronger language. Wonder why he never went in for Belle Brabazon? From all I hear he was genuinely spoony there," and Jack thought if he had Charlie's income, he would very soon come to serious business with any girl he was really fond of. Then he thought of the fair unknown, and wondered whether she had any money. Then he thought of what he had seen of married officers struggling along on small incomes, and wondered how far four hundred a year went in those cases. The latter reflection was so extremely unpalatable, that he turned into the Thermopolium and solaced himself with sherry and bitters.

CHAPTER XIII.

EPSOM DOWNS.

THE Derby day dawned, contrary to the promise of the week, with a cloudless sky. The myriads who yearly keep the festival, proceeded to their various depths of ablution in all jollity befitting the occasion. From "Costermonger Joe," who took his rinse under the pump about two, to His Grace, who got into his bath at eleven, and travelled down by "a special," burst forth in cheery tones the exclamation, Hurrah, fine day after all !

To lose your money is bad, but to lose it on a wet day is the very deuce ; one of the most depressing trials that a Derbyite—no political allusion—can sustain. I am not going to inflict upon you the hundred times told tale of "Epsom and back." We have simply to follow the fortunes of one or two of the characters in my story, and see what befell them there : whether they bore their good fortune with moderation, or took their "Epsom salts" without wry faces.

Jack Travers and Repton went down together by road, and arriving there in the usual course of events, walked into "the ring" to see what was doing. That excitable element was at its noisiest. The roar of—"I'll lay against Cincas, Sittingbourne, &c., the Derby I'll bet upon, want to back one, sir," continuous.

These Titans of the betting ring are always a subject of wonderment and mystery to me. After the excitement of speculating in thousands, one wonders whether they think it worth while to count their change for a glass of ale. What are they like in the bosoms of their families ? Does Mr. Foresight, the leviathan bookmaker, respond in his domestic circle to the soft announcement that dinner is ready, with his accustomed war cry of "I'll take odds." Or meet his neighbour's mild observation that it looks like a fine day, with the fierce rejoinder of, "It rains a pony."

"All right," replied Jack. "Our fellows have a drag somewhere opposite, with all the necessaries of life on board. I never look at a race after the Derby, on principle. You must drink the horse's health when you win, and you want champagne still more when you lose. So come along."

The pair made their way across the course; meandered in and out of endless breaks and carriages; made numberless bad casts at the drag they sought. Charlie had already expressed his opinion that the drag of the —th was a myth, and the lunch but another of Jack's "good things," when—

"Here you are, Travers!" broke cheerily on their ears. "Come along. This is the shop to learn what to eat, drink, and avoid in. Here's Herries making himself ill with lobster salad, while the Doctor's been struggling so long with that pigeon-pie, that if he hasn't tumbled into it—and goodness knows it's about big enough—he must have tumbled the best part of it into him. Here you are—lots of room!"

The speaker was young Rolls, in all the exuberance and fun of a first Derby.

The room that he spoke of so airily was rather apocryphal. The drag, as drags are apt to be on this occasion, being pretty well covered with hungry luncheon seekers; but, then again, fortunately there is no limit to the number you can put on them, and Charlie Repton was inducted at last into a seat on the foot-board.

"Now, Crumbs," said Jack, "hand us something eatable down here; and if you'll give me a tumbler full of anything cold, bar water, I'll drink your health, so I daresay will Repton, if you'll give him a chance."

Thus adjured, Rolls speedily provided a bottle of champagne and some eatables. Indeed, that young gentleman quite revelled in administering to the wants of his fellow-creatures, and what with hallooing to what he designated 'pals' in the distance, 'to come and feed,' and hob-nobbing with other 'pals' on other drags in his immediate vicinity, had his hands quite

full. Occasionally he expressed his opinion to Jack that this was "no end of a lark," and that he never meant to miss another Derby.

"Well, Crumbs, did you win your money?" inquired Jack.

"Of course I did. Drew The West in a sweep. Awful chaff here, against the Doctor! He drew a 'dead 'un,' as we tell him, quite *professional*! he's savage as can be, at least he was; he's 'mellowing up' a bit now, under the influence of lunch."

"How do, Herries? how are you, Rolls? Give me a glass of sherry, I'm about beat," said Delpré, who at that moment made his way up to the drag. "Well, Travers! did the 'all black' suit you? Jolly day, isn't it? thought on Monday we should have awful weather, but it's turned out very well."

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," said a shabbily-attired, tall, cadaverous-looking man, with a steely blue eye, who had just approached. "Beg pardon, gentlemen; but if any of you likes a bit of quiet sport, my partner and I have got a little 'chicken' and such like going on there, just where you see the broom."

"Here you are, Doctor," cried Rolls, "here's a chance to mend your fortunes! Win all your money back at roulette."

"Quite right, sir," said the man. "Now's the time to get back your losings. Now's the time to treble your winnings. Give us a turn, sir; horses break down, but the little ball always gets home. I'm sent down here express, *I am*, by a band of regular stick-at-nothing philanthropists, who don't like to hear of anybody coming home a loser from Epsom." Here he burst out into a verse of an old race-course song—

"Some with heavy sumphs, and some with poury faces,
Wish as they go home, they'd never seen the cussed races."

None of that says my employers. 'Tom, my man,' says they, 'you'll go down and succour the afflicted. Let 'em win their money back again, and go home smiling.' Here I am, a solace for losers, a regular California for winners. Here you are,

money to be won, an easy chair to do it in, and gratuitous champagne. Porters provided at only five per cent. to carry your winnings home for you. Come across, gentlemen, break the bank and have done with it. I want to get back to take my missus to the opera. But my orders is not to leave till I've distributed the last sovereign."

A more finished specimen of rascality could scarcely be met with, as with grinning face he poured forth the above torrent of "patter," greeted with shouts of laughter by the excited luncheon party.

"Come along," said Rolls, "let's go and chance a pound or so with 'this solace for losers,' and see what sort of a crib he's got."

"Thank you, sir. You'll give me a turn, Captain, won't you?" said the man, addressing Delpré, in a rather marked manner.

Delpré had not been paying much attention to what was going on ; but he now turned, pausing in the act of raising his glass to his lips as the tones caught his ear. As he expected, he recognised Davidson.

"Thank you, my man. I'd rather back my judgment racing than my luck at roulette ; however, you'll doubtless find plenty who are not of my opinion ;" and as he spoke, he jumped off the wheel on which he had been standing. An example followed by Rolls and three or four others.

"Come along, Jack," exclaimed that excited youth, "let's have one turn at the tables ; I know I'm in luck."

"All right," replied Travers, "I don't mind just for twenty minutes."

"What a fool you are," said Repton. "Confound it ! you're old enough to know better."

"Nonsense, come along, Charlie, it's all in the day's work."

"Not I," replied Repton. "We shall meet at dinner."

"All right, I am off for a little gamble," and Jack, Rolls, and

two or three more, preceded by Davidson, made their way across to the canvas-walled Temple of Fortune.

It was a flash establishment of its kind. A long table ran up the centre, one end of which was devoted to the mysteries of chicken-hazard, the other to those of roulette, while on a side table were placed refreshments of all sorts.

"Hang your roulette," said Jack, "let's go for the legitimate thing," and the party made their way to the upper end of the tent.

"Pass me the box," said Travers, as he threw his stake upon 'the in.' Five's the main, following the announcement immediately with a fatal deuce ace ; his second hand was little better as he threw out again almost immediately, but with his third he was more successful, throwing in four successive mains.

"Real good thing this," said Jack, "give us some champagne. Here you are, Crumbs," and he passed the box.

Rolls knew nothing of this game, but played under the mentorship of Travers, and as is so often the case, the dice came to his call and he had a most successful turn against the bank. The others followed suit with dubious fortune. We cannot follow all the vagaries of the game, suffice it to say in about an hour the whole party were thoroughly cleared out, with the exception of Rolls, who apparently could do no wrong. They had

bly 'out,' but had now resolved not to touch the box himself, it succeeded, and still with a paroxysm of prudence. Having repaid Crumbs, *recouped* all his losses, and finding himself a few sovereigns to the good, he touched Rolls as he passed the box, and said :

"That'll do, Crumbs, get money for those counters, and come away at once."

"Nonsense, I'm going to break the bank," was the rejoinder, "I'm in screaming luck."

"Do as I tell you at once, there's a deuced rough lot gathered at the far end of the tent, and if we don't clear out pretty quickly, we shall take very little of any kind out with us. Here, Barton," he said in an under tone, "close up, keep close to Crumbs, and mind we all stick together going out."

The barker was some little time cashing Rolls's counters, and pressed him strongly to have another turn.

"Nonsense," said Jack, "we'll give you another turn to-morrow, it's too late now. All right, Crumbs; keep close, Sledge."

Barton, or as he was called in the regiment "Sledge," was just the man for the situation. Broad-shouldered, bull-necked, and about medium height, he was the athlete of the corps, great at rowing, cricket, rackets, and all athletic games; he was always more or less in training, and could hold his own with his 'hands' against most professionals. A real good row was a thing he rather revelled in, though as inoffensive a man as ever walked. Still his spirits rather rose at the prospect of a shindy;

"Now," muttered Jack, as they made their way down the tent, "we'll get out without a row if we can; but if it does come, hit out in earnest at once."

"All right, 'drive on,'" replied Sledge.

On nearing the doorway, they found a lot of 'roughs' closing in upon them. Jack tried to push his way through; but was pushed rudely back by a beetling-browed man, who requested to know where he was shoving to?

"Shoving no where," retorted Jack, "I'm only making my way out. Let me pass, can't you?"

"And can't you find any other way out than over my toes," said the beetling-browed man, putting himself straight in Jack's path.

"I didn't tread on your confounded feet, but I am going out, so get out of the way."

"Oh, that's your game is it?" and without more ado the beetling-browed one aimed a blow at Jack that would probably have stretched him on the grass, had it not been for Sledge Barton.

Sledge opined, as he said afterwards, that it was getting time to edge in, and he kept his eye fixed on Jack's adversary. The ruffian's arm was struck up by Sledge just in time, while at the same time letting go his other hand he caught the aggressor full under the jaw, and felled him to the ground. The row of course now became general, blows were exchanged right and left, hats were knocked off, and a watch or two went in the scrimmage; but, thanks principally to their formidable champion, in a couple of minutes or so they found themselves outside. Here a tremendous rush on them was made; Rolls was knocked down, but rescued by Travers, who, in turn, went down from a straight one on the nose. But Sledge, whose tremendous hitting had established a funk, fought his way to the spot, and Jack was soon on his legs again.

"Run away, Rolls, you young fool," roared Sledge. "You're no use here, we'll be deuced soon out of it when you're once off," and thus adjured, Crumbs took to his heels. "Now, Jack, draw back a second, here's one last dash in to cow them," and Sledge made a final charge on their assailants, knocked one clean off his legs, struck down another's hand, and closing with him threw him heavily, then hastily rejoining Jack and his friends made a retreat more rapid than dignified.

"This is what comes of a little 'chicken,'" said Jack, as they regained
nose. no hat,
clothes.

"Pretty thing while it lasted," remarked Barton, with the air of a connoisseur. "I should like to have had just ten minutes with that black-faced looking scoundrel who began it. I never saw him again."

"No," said Jack, "I think you put him out of it at starting.

Now, you fellows, we want a little brandy and water and a clothes-brush."

"Why, what's up?" "What's the matter?" "Where have you been?" were the inquiries showered on them from the drag.

"Never mind, we'll tell you directly. Where's Crumbs?"

"Here I am, all right. I couldn't find the trap at first. Give me a little brandy please, one of you."

"Did you stick to the money?" inquired Jack.

"Yes, all right," panted Rolls, who between the row, the run, a knock down, champagne and excitement, had not much breath left to speak of.

"Good," said Barton, "then we'll call a list of casualties." A couple of cut lips, a cut eye, and Jack's still bleeding nose comprised the casualties. A couple of hats gone, a couple smashed, and a watch missing, the deficiencies.

"What a duffer you were to bring a watch to Epsom, Herries!" ejaculated Travers. "Let's look at your winnings, Crumbs."

Rolls handed over his bundle of notes, the object of the campaign.

"Yes," said Jack, after looking over them, "I think they'll do. There's a couple of doubtful ones, but the rest seem right enough. I say, did anybody see that confounded brute who took us there. He was hovering about during the play, very pressing with champagne; but I never saw him towards the end of the business."

"No," said Herries, "I saw him slip out a few minutes before we got up, and I fancied I caught sight of him pointing to Rolls just before the row;—but I saw no more of him. It's my impression if we had waited a few minutes longer, we shouldn't have got off so easy. They were not quite prepared for Jack's sudden move."

"Never mind, I think I shall know his ugly face again," growled Barton, "and the next time I see it, I'll mark it for

him if possible. Hurrah ! here come the horses. Now, then, who's for town ?

"Well, I'm off," said Jack. "I'm going up by rail. I wish to goodness I'd a hat."

"Here you are, I've a felt hat inside," and Rolls, after a dive into the boot, produced one. "Good bye."

"How Charlie will laugh," muttered Jack, as he walked away, "a hard fight and losing one's hat all for four sovereigns. Never mind, lucky I didn't lose more. As Charlie says, I'm 'old enough to know better.' Glad Crumbs made such a good thing of it, though."

Old enough to know better. Yes, the phrase is drummed into us from our childhood. When we tear our frocks, and lose our shoes, we are remonstrated with in those self-same words—and yet do we ever arrive at that age when we *do* know better ? Who of us cannot recall the school-boy scrape in which he happened to be the biggest or oldest of the party ? Were you not kept to the last as the largest plum of the lot, and did not six stripes or so extra endorse that fatal aphorism ? In your first early scrape in life, when your friends came to your assistance, though they smoothed it over with great kind-

do hate that phrase ; how I wish Methuselah had had a Boswell to give us an account of the last ten years of his venerable life. I have no doubt he burnt his fingers still, though he had been doing it so many centuries. If you marry or speculate imprudently, how your friends shake their heads and *did think*, &c. Are we ever old enough to know better ? Do neither men nor women ever make fools of themselves after three score ? It's all very well, but the follies, miscalled of youth, are not got through all at once, like whooping-cough and measles. Some of us take to them later in life. The limit of our life is the limit of our follies. We don't get rid of them all by five-and-

twenty. Do you recall the hero or heroine of the ballad, I forget which, who

"Gathered shells from morn till night,
Then threw them one by one away;"

and much in the same way do we pass our days getting through our follies.

"When our vices have left us, we fancy that we have left them." Our follies of ten years ago have been thrown away because they cease to amuse, not that we are a bit the wiser. Probably we have taken others to our hearts in their places.

The last race of the day was over; the crowd had surged across the course, the betting lawn was rapidly emptying. Gamblers and pleasure-seekers, winners and losers, ladies by title and ladies by courtesy, the whole of the motley gathering was once more swarming back to the great hive. Was there not Cremorne, and many a sight besides for those who like to see their holiday fairly out. Lounging with his back to the rails of the enclosure, moodily smoking a cigar, while his eye fell vacantly over the changing, bustling crowd, was Delpré. His thoughts were none of the cheeriest. He had backed Cincas for a good deal of money, besides having laid to a considerable extent against the winner, and his active brain was already calculating how he could manage to float over the fatal Monday, and whether the usual thing of a "plunge" on the Oaks looked feasible.

His reflections were broken by a touch on the shoulder, as some one muttered gently:

"What the devil do you want?" inquired Delpré, savagely. "Come outside a minute," said the other, "I want to talk to you. I think you had better."

Delpré hesitated a second. "Confound him!" he muttered,

"I never was afraid of him, and always did have the best of him. I won't funk now, though he may have made out some other pull over me," and he found Davidson outside.

"Now what is it?" he inquired, angrily; "if it's money, you've applied to the wrong man."

"No, I shouldn't have thought of applying to you after today. You are more likely to borrow than lend."

Delpré started, he was not given to talk about his turf transactions. How could Davidson know he was a heavy loser?

"Probably, then, you've come to volunteer a loan," he sneered.

"Well, you are a cool hand. You always were, and took 'a facer' well in the old days. No, I'm sorry for you, Del; but you've got it hot this time, I know well. Bless you, I can know what winner 'll suit most men now when it's worth my while. It is to know about you, as an old friend; so I took that trouble. I could reckon up what paper you've got out as well, little as you may think it. You've had a baddish year again, so far."

"I suppose," said Delpré, calmly, "you think it might be a good spec to buy up the paper."

"I shouldn't mind doing that," returned the other, "if I had the capital. I've made worse investments in my time."

"Dare say you have ; but you scarcely called me out here to inform me that I was a loser on the Derby, I presume."

"No, I want you to do me, that is to do us a turn; not to say but we'd make it well worth your while besides," and here Davidson hesitated.

"Go on," replied Delpré, "it's getting late, and I want to be off."

tersall's to play into our hands a bit. We'd do very well if we had only that; but we've all made rather too much noise in society in our time. We've got a tidy capital. Skinning the innocents is safe and profitable, but the business wants extend-

ing ; we've a horse or two besides, and often want a gentleman jock. Now you've had a facer—why not join us ? You shall have your share. Now, for instance, we've had a d—d bad day to-day. You could bring a few young ones over to-morrow, just to try their hand," and Davidson jerked his head in the direction of the gambling booth.

"In short, turn bonnet to your roulette table. Davidson, you're a fool. I've not quite come to that yet, and must decline the honour."

"Honour with you !" thundered the other. "Do you forget what I know and can speak to—"

"Don't lose your temper, understanding always goes with it,
I thought we settled all
and is any stronger than it
was then. No, I'll play my own game yet awhile."

"Delpré, you infernal scoundrel !" cried Davidson, stung to madness by his opponent's coolness. "You ruined me years ago. You shall make up for it now, or, by Heaven I'll publish the whole of that Indian business to-morrow."

"And nobody will believe you. Now listen to me," and his voice changed from cold superciliousness to a harsh grating tone. "If you dare address me on a race-course till I speak to you, I'll give you in charge of the police, and break up your wretched gambling booth in about ten minutes. Strip your pigeons yourself. You had a handful of them to-day, if you had had brains enough to pluck them. But speak to me, or interfere with me in any way, and I'll do away with you altogether. Rob in your own way if you will, but don't cross me, or it will be the worse for you."

"Perhaps you forget I hold that letter of yours yet," rejoined Davidson ; but the half sulky, half cowed tones in which he uttered it, showed that he again succumbed to the bolder spirit.

"No, I don't. If I had feared that, you wouldn't be at large now. If I was afraid of it this minute,"—he paused, hissed into Davidson's ear—"I don't think you'd ever leave these

Downs," turned sharp on his heel, and walked rapidly towards the station.

"Curse him!" muttered Davidson; "he's too many for me again. Perhaps he's not hit quite so hard as I thought. But look out, it will be my turn some day yet. Something tells me it will. I want him badly. If we had only his head amongst us, we might do anything. The time will come when he won't cling to that shred of respectability any longer; then we shall see. It's only waiting a little longer. I should like to see him what he's made me," and with another execration the baffled ruffian walked off to "his haunts unlawful."

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. BARTLEY AT HOME.

THE springs of the human mind, the motives of our fellow-bits of humanity—why they do this, and why they say that? Such are the speculations we are wont to indulge in with a view to showing our knowledge of mankind. Your clever man of the world is very apt to be over cunning. Like the detective police, when first called in to solve a mysterious murder, he invariably looks for a motive. Some of the greatest crimes have apparently been committed without any motive. I say apparently, because it may be simply that we never penetrated it. In the same way, a large proportion of mankind are continually acting without any motive.

Of course, as rational creatures, it would be but fair to conceive that we had 'some method in our madness,' but the more you see of this world, the more convinced you are that it has not. We have all seen a man ask another to dinner whom he meets for the first time. Not that there was any reason for his doing so—not that he fancied the individual—not that he thought him amusing, or had any idea that he ever would be.

On the contrary, he would probably sum up the thing after mature deliberation somehow in this wise :

Well, I think he's rather a cad ; am pretty certain he's a bore. I know nothing of his antecedents, though I trust they're respectable ; but he'll probably turn out a nuisance, and why I asked him to dinner, I don't know ; but I rather wish I hadn't.

There are a great many invitations of this sort given in the course of the year.

A man murders another apparently for some few shillings, no rare occurrence, as 'the papers' will prove. You say those few shillings could not have been his motive. I don't know ; it depends so much what those few shillings might represent to him. It is not actually, perhaps, those shillings, but what he wanted those shillings for. Very likely, again, the shillings had nothing to do with it ; but were a mere corollary after the deed, when, having done it, he thought he might as well have those shillings. I have great doubts of the crime of murder being immediately followed by any great horror. I should fancy that is quite an after-sensation, faint in proportion to the more or less brutalization of the nature.

It really seems sometimes as if men were impelled to murder by sheer force of that thirst to kill, which lies innate in humanity. Though the law is supposed to curb that impulse, yet the impulse is at times so strong, it makes light of the possible consequences. Clever people lose a vast deal of time in speculating on trifles, and seeking for motives sometimes where none exist. I was once staying with a friend at a very pleasant country house. We were asked to prolong our visit some two or three days ; I was for assenting, but my friend obstinately refused. Go he must. Why wouldn't he stay ? What had he to do ? What was the attraction that called him away ? On all of these points he preserved an impenetrable silence ; but stay, he said, he could not. Having come with him, though sorely against the grain, I felt bound to depart with him. When seated in the train, I once more in most in-

jured tones demanded why he had persisted in his refusal. "It was very jolly, the people meant it, and I know you've nothing to do."

"You're quite right ; I've nothing particular to do, and it was extremely jolly ; but—*I had put on my last clean shirt!*" Motive inscrutable to the acutest of observers, unless it was betrayed to the servant who valeted him.

It was with a perturbed mind that Jack Travers made his way one sunny afternoon, just after the Derby, towards Grosvenor Square. He was arguing with himself as to whether he was not in a fair way to fall in love in real earnest. Falling in love was nothing, Jack had been doing that ever since he could remember ; he looked upon it as a sort of duty he owed to society, and in his course of garrison life had generally surrendered to the first pretty girl who had thought it worth while to throw her fascinations around him. That was all very well—to dance with her, find her shawl, take care of her at picnics, walk with her at the band, and finally, when the *route* came, go through, scientifically, a sentimental parting. All this he understood as well as most men. Voted his next ball slow because *she* was not there. Eschewed going out in consequence, and took to whist instead, for a month, by which time he had established a flirtation of the same character again, as doubtless had the lady. These are very harmless *tendresses*, and taking to whist for a month, when you play as badly as Jack Travers did, is a "wearing of the willow" that may satisfy any young lady's vanity.

Military matrimonialism was a thing Jack had always contemplated with a sort of pious horror—he had seen so much of its discomforts. He had once summed up his ideas of matrimony to his friend Herries in these words :—

"Very respectable institution, you know, and of course just the thing to do in another five or six years, when one's tired of knocking about. Nothing I should like better than to settle down with a nice girl for my wife a few miles out of town ; but

then you see," and here Herries always said Jack looked as sagacious as Solomon, "the nice girls never have any money, just like you and me. I suppose we are nice fellows on that very principle. So, Bob, I expect you and I will have to rub along till strong tobacco and the mess wines prove too much for us."

As he made his way up Bond Street, he thought to himself, "How foolish I am, I know I shall get fond of that girl, I mean real spoony, and of course it's all bosh; she hasn't got any money, they never have when they are as good-looking as she is; what's the good of it? I'd much better have a cigar and go and see those horses sold at Tattersall's. However, I ought to call on Mrs. Bartley."

There was very little occasion for his calling on Belle, he knew her but slightly, still it's never difficult to find a good reason for what we want to do.

By the time he had got to Grosvenor Square, Jack was quite satisfied it would have been the extreme of rudeness to omit calling on Mrs. Bartley; in fact, nothing but the Derby week could have excused his not calling before, though had Belle heard and read aright his exclamation of "By Jove, what a sell if she's left!" she'd have thought it a very dubious compliment.

"Yes, sir," was the reply to his, "Mrs. Bartley at home?" and Jack was duly ushered upstairs.

It was a bright, pretty room, abounding in the signs of cultivated feminine tastes. Tables covered with knick-knacks such as women love, an open piano, scattered music, clever proof engravings, and one or two good pictures on the walls; rare flowers in the vases; books scattered as if for use not ornament, not wretched annuals, all gilt morocco and engraving, but Tennyson, Kingsley, and the older classics peeped out from bookcase and table. Copies of Shakespeare, Moore, &c., were strewed about, mixed with leading periodicals, which not to read, is to a certain extent not to live.

There is a certain amount of sensuality about all this earthly clay of ours, even in its highest type, that of intellectual sensuality. The mere aspect of a room influences us more or less. Who of us has not encountered that awful drawing-room so evidently set apart for the reception of company—with its chairs, tables, books, &c., all arranged with mathematical uniformity? You may have entered that room in the most genial frame of mind. Your latest joke, your newest story, all your chit-chat dies away upon your tongue in the awful ten minutes that elapse before the hostess appears. A dreadful conviction comes over you that she is dressing for your reception. You are struck with consternation at the *bouleversément* you are causing. You feel frozen and paralysed. You would fly, were it possible, and when the lady of the house enters, your first impulse is to apologise for being there at all. Half a dozen dreary common-places, your quarter of an hour is at last up, and you escape to the street like a school-boy, an incubus has been removed, and thank God that awful visit has been paid.

I do not think the intellectual was a predominant characteristic of Jack Travers, yet he gazed round the room with an undefined sense of satisfaction, and after depositing his hat on a chair was proceeding to an examination of his own good-looking countenance in the glass over the mantelpiece, when a laughing voice exclaimed—

"How do you do, Mr. Travers," and from the recess of the window, where almost concealed by the curtains she had been engaged in drawing, stepped Breezie Langton.

It is a little embarrassing to be caught admiring yourself by the lady you have come to profess admiration for; but Jack recovered himself instantly, as bowing he said:

"Beg pardon, but really I didn't see you."

"Oh, dear no, Mr. Travers; it is I that should apologise for interrupting you in such an agreeable study. I could expect nothing less than to be overlooked till you had fulfilled the duty of self-examination. I trust it was satisfactory."

"Confoundedly the reverse," thought Jack, as he replied—"I suppose you look in the glass sometimes. Won't your nervousness about bonnets suggest an excuse for my anxiety on the subject of collars? Awaiting the joint fire of yourself and Mrs. Bartley, it would argue fool-hardiness not to ascertain if there were any weak points in one's armour."

"Prettily put, sir; a gross salve to our vanity to mask your own. Mrs. Bartley will be down directly; sit down, pray, and recount what you have been about since you played squire to an errant damsel on the Great Northern."

"Nay, it is rather for you to recount how you fared with those dreaded relations, and explain how my prophecy was fulfilled; you said the other day it was, you know."

"Oh yes, my aunts turned out the dearest old women possible: my uncle would have spoilt me if such a thing could be, and really upon the whole I must say I was not very much bullied. Do you know," she said, laughing, "I was allowed to do pretty much as I pleased."

"I have not much doubt of that; the question is rather did you let them do as they pleased, or did you tyrannise to an unpardonable extent?"

"On my word, Mr. Travers, you have a very pretty opinion of me. I'm sure what little innovations I made in the house were very much for their good. They were a little—what shall I say—hum-drum in their ways, and I only brightened them up a bit."

"I dare say you did. I only hope you didn't frighten them by letting in the light too suddenly."

At this moment Mrs. Bartley entered the room, and welcomed Jack cordially.

"Very glad to see you, Mr. Travers. You men always behave disgracefully about coming to see your old friends these racing times. None of you ever treat us with common civility from the Derby week till after Ascot. I hope Breezie has done the honours properly."

"Oh, Belle, dear, there was no necessity! Mr. Travers was doing all the honours to himself when I interrupted him," and Miss Langton favoured Jack with a mischievous glance of her bright eyes.

Jack was a little mystified at finding himself so summarily classed in the catalogue of Mrs. Bartley's old friends. The windings of a woman's mind have puzzled cleverer men than Jack Travers. The plain English of her speech was that Charlie Repton had not called, and that he, Travers, might signify to that delinquent Belle's displeasure thereat.

"Well, I don't know," he replied. "One never has any time. There is always, somehow, so much to do just now. So many dinners to eat, and all that sort of thing. I'm sure I wonder sometimes how people ever get through it at all. But, Mrs. Bartley, I must be going. I have something for me."

"I wish you'd introduce me to this young lady, for I really have no idea who she is."

"Oh, Belle, and he knows quite well! I am 'The Lady of King's Cross.' What does he mean?" cried Breezie, laughing.

"Still," pursued Jack, "I should hardly fancy that would be the correct way to address you. It's awkward making mistakes, and I am afraid Lady Kingscross is not in the pages of Burke."

"No," laughed Mrs. Bartley, "I am afraid not. What shall we say, Breezie! That it's quite a new creation. Stand up, my dear, while I present you in due form. Miss Langton—Mr. Travers."

Breezie jumped up and made a mock curtsy of the deepest. "Ah!" she said, "I was afraid I should not keep my incognito long. Are you shocked after all, Mr. Travers, to find that I am really nobody in particular? It's too bad of Belle, for I did hope you took me for a princess in disguise, at least."

"There," said Mrs. Bartley, "now you know each other; though for the matter of that, I don't think my introduction

has helped you much. A truce to *badinage*. You would make a very pretty princess, Breezie, and when the prince comes we'll all go to the wedding, my dear. In the meantime, let's talk a little of what goes on in the world we live in. How many days are you engaged for, Mr. Travers? Next week, of course, you will be immersed in Ascot. Breezie and I are coming down to see you all discomfited on the Cup Day, and provide ourselves with gloves for the rest of the season. Friday week we intend early strawberries and a day at Richmond. Will you join us? or have you still dinners to eat?"

"Dinners may go uneaten!" exclaimed Jack. "I shall only be too happy to go campaigning with you. We'll drop London and be Arcadian; flowers, strawberries, shepherdesses in silks, and all that sort of thing."

"Yes, all that sort of thing, with strawberries in particular; and if you are good, make yourself agreeable, and are not convicted of escaping for surreptitious cigars in the course of the afternoon, I'll give you some tea here when we get back."

"Charming! Pray consider me entirely at your orders."

Afternoon tea here made its appearance, a pleasant institution now happily in vogue everywhere; though, perhaps, most enjoyable in a good country-house, where the events of the day are canvassed; the score at the cover side; what sort of run it was; who went well; who came to grief; and who palpably shirked, perhaps judiciously, that awkward stake and binder. Then, perhaps, the *rôle* for the evening is settled. Charades, tableaux, dancing, or what not, mapped out ere the ladies retire to dress for dinner.

Still, even in London, it is very pleasant where you are really intimate; and if you are not, fly the first tinkle of the tea-cups. That half hour is not for you, and your hostess will, probably, wish you at Timbuctoo, or still hotter climes, should you be rash enough to persist in remaining. I am not, of course, alluding to that melancholy entertainment, now in

fashion, called a kettle-drum—a tea on a large scale, which reminds one of a fashionable “Brick Lane Temperance Association,” with all the fun taken out of it.

Jack Travers’s case was peculiar; if not intimate, he decidedly meant being so. He had got his opening, and though by no means unconscious of his temerity, of which the arrival of one or two *habitués* of the house gave due warning, he stood his ground boldly, more especially as he was thrown more into a *tête-à-tête* with Breezie Langton, Belle’s attention being naturally diverted to the new comers.

It is difficult to mark out that almost imperceptible line where flirtation ceases and love-making proper begins. If there be such a visionary equator, I am afraid we often get over it by accident, and find ourselves on the south, or matrimonial side before we are aware of it. A lady of my acquaintance, of considerable powers of observation, declares she can tell by our extreme awkwardness; she says that falling over our own feet, and not knowing what to do with our gloves, are sure signs of earnestness of purpose.

However, these are mere speculations, and were very far from occurring to Jack Travers, as he bade Mrs. Bartley good-bye.

“Don’t forget you belong to us from four o’clock on Friday, Mr. Travers,” said Belle, and with this and a smiling little nod from Breezie, imprinted on his memory, he found himself again in the street. On the whole, I don’t think he regretted much not having gone to Tattersall’s, and felt uncommon little interest in the sale of those horses now. Jack walked along in the highest possible spirits. To have quoted his heretic speech to Herries, in his hearing, would have been cruel in the extreme. Not for one moment that he was thinking of marriage at this time. He only thought what a nice girl Miss Langton was. What a charming woman, Mrs. Bartley! What a brick—I am afraid that would have been his expression—she was to ask him to join them on Friday. How he hoped it would be a fine

day, &c. In short, as Laura Clippington would have said, he was "hooked, my dear."

I believe your men, who coolly make up their minds to win, and begin in earnest from the first, generally carry their point in love as in most other things. There is a self-confidence, and bull-dog determination about them that must tell in the long run. The lady gets frightened at a suitor whom no rebuff seems to discourage, and finally says, Yes, protesting all the time she means No. But the drifters and vacillators are apt to find the lady vacillate too, and their *amour propre* prevents their rising at a rebuff as the determined man does. I have heard it laid down, that as water wears away the stone, so no woman can persist in a refusal if you have but the nerve to persevere in asking the question. It is a great thing to know your own mind. People invariably think they do; but the proportion is absurdly small who have much idea of it.

Jack turned into Piccadilly, still thinking of the bright drawing-room he had so lately left, when the reflection crossed him: "I wonder why the deuce Charlie hasn't called?" Then he thought of the scene in the Ryalston house, and he said to himself, "I suppose he did care a good deal for the widow, but he was afraid of the strong running he made with Mrs. Inglemere. I wonder whether he's in earnest about the widow? It's deuced difficult to tell when Charlie's in earnest about anything, and yet I fancy if he was roused he would mean it with a vengeance."

Crossing Dover Street with this reflection, he ran against the individual in question, who, after the usual greeting, asked where he had come from.

"Just been to call on Mrs. Bartley," said Jack.

"Ah! cementing your acquaintance with the young lady of the rail. Who is she? What's her name? I suppose you have found that out now?"

"A Miss Langton ; but I know no more about her. Mrs.

Bartley rather fired a shot at you, I think, for your shortcomings in the calling way."

"That's the worst of a London season. Women never can be made to understand you have anything to do but call, and even go the length of fancying we introduce our pasteboard surreptitiously. Women's society becomes a bore, they are so *exigeantes*. Do we go to Ascot together, next week?"

"Certainly. Tell you what, I think I shall know a pretty good thing for 'the Stakes.' I shall hear all about it in a day or two."

Charlie smiled; he knew Jack's foible, and felt that if he were dying, he would leave a fatal tip with his doctor as a legacy.

"Tell me, how did Belle look, and what sort of a house has she got?"

"Wough!" whistled Jack. "What can it matter to you, just taking the vows of monastic seclusion? She's more charming than ever, and, if such a thing could be possible, her house is more charming still. Bother giving up society. Join her party for Richmond, on Friday week. She told me to . . . be a jolly day if the weather

"Well, perhaps I may. What time's the meet?"

"Four o'clock. Mind you come—do you good, a little country air and quiet conversation, helped by strawberries and cream. Have you seen Tom Lytlereck lately?"

"No; but he's safe to be in town, in fact I know he is, as I had an invite from him, to what he called a quiet dinner in the Temple, two or three days ago. Tom's quiet dinners should be called evening entertainments, for there's nothing left but bed to go to when they finish."

"Well, I must go home and dress for dinner. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Charlie, and he sauntered home, thinking by the way a good deal about Belle Bartley. He made up his mind to go to this party on Friday. He didn't care anything

about her now, but she was an old friend, and he should like to see how she got on now she was married. What could have made her marry Bartley? He didn't believe she ever cared for him a bit.

CHAPTER XV.

A FRATERNAL VISIT.

PORTLAND PLACE is not a lively street to perambulate, unless you expect to meet somebody you care about. A hope of which might, perhaps, cast a roseate hue over Dorset Square, the most depressing part of London with which I am acquainted. However, the finish of a fine sunny day just after Epsom, saw Delpré walking up the street most moodily. He stopped opposite a large house, the straw laid down in front of which plainly denoted illness within, and rang.

Delpré had two sisters, from ten to twelve years older than himself. The eldest had married a French count, who had departed this life some fifteen years ago. The second was still a maiden lady, verging on the fifties. With his sisters, Delpré was not on the best of terms. They had helped him, more particularly the Countess, for she was the monied one of the two, out of endless scrapes; but our nearest and dearest relations must set some limit to assistance. The most liberal of governors, the richest and jolliest of uncles, (I except stage ones, whose purses have no limit), will not pay debts for ever. They set us on our legs, and give us chance after chance to run straight; but in ordinary life there must be an end to this at last. There are other ties to the absurdity of continuing to go on, and as little better than this, in spite of all his cleverness, I am afraid Delpré must be classed. Most gentlemen who are on the Turf, and *understand* it, are beaten, because they look upon

winnings as income, and so to be spent, instead of regarding them simply as capital, which the next turn of the market may draw upon. They win five hundred, and live at the rate of two thousand a year on the strength of it. The result is obvious. Betting, to men of moderate means, is or should be, if indulged in at all, a business, not as our French neighbours would say, "a distraction."

Delpré, though by no means a fool in his speculations, and as has already been shown by no means scrupulous either, was addicted to living up to his winnings. Moreover, he was a confirmed gambler. Though able to hold his own at all games of skill, and rarely overrating his own powers thereat, he never could resist the fatal fascinations of hazard. He believed, in a different way, as much in his star as Jack Travers, and after a good day at Newmarket, was always keen to double his winnings in the evening. We all know what comes of that.

The Countess had helped him on two or three ticklish occasions ; but latterly had decided to spend her money for herself. There had never been any great love between the brother and sisters ; they had seen too little of each other to admit of that. They were grown up, and on the Continent, while he was at school in England, and from the time he entered the army until his return from India, their meetings had been few and far between. Since then he had, of course, seen much more of them. The last two or three times Delpré had applied to his sister, the Countess had positively declined to assist him further.

It had been a disastrous week for the Captain, and he foresaw an accumulation of paper coming due at the end of the next sixty days, that even he, fertile as he was in resources, could only look upon as destruction. His sister was seriously ill he knew, and he had come up to inquire about her.

"How is the Countess?" he inquired of the servant who opened the door.

"Very ill indeed, sir," was the reply. "The doctor has just

did not possess that power—Newton was a wonderful example. Every really great man has possessed it more or less, and in exact proportion to his possession of that faculty has he been more or less great. Where it exists in its highest phase, it is accompanied by the power of entirely divesting the mind of the subject in hand at will. Charlie, there, for example, has his Derby book eternally running in his head, whatever he may be engaged in. The Duke of Wellington could dine and sleep dismissing the fate of the Peninsula utterly from his thoughts. So history tells us could Alexander—”

“That’ll do, Tom. Never mind the Ancients. Besides, we all know Alexander took his liquor freely—an easy way of dismissing most things from his mind. When I’ve had my bottle of ‘Forty-four,’ it’s little my Derby book troubles me.”

“And why, Mr. Lyttlereck, shouldn’t I concentrate my faculties on a conundrum?” inquired Puzzleton, rather nettled.

“Rude in the first place,” retorted Tom, “because you ought to have been, or affected to have been, intensely interested in my little anecdote. Foolish in the second, because you wasted that valuable power on a frivolous object.”

“I don’t see it at all,” rejoined Puzzleton, getting really very angry. “Riddles are a source of amusement to me, and I suppose I may employ those powers of concentration you are kind enough to attribute to me, to their elucidation if it suits me?”

The little man was getting on his stilts, his custom when annoyed.

“Quite right,” said Lechmere. “Never mind Tom and his eccentric theories. We’ll all have a shy at the riddle immediately, and scorn the idea of bed till it’s solved. Help yourself, Tom. Forbes, there’s another cigar on the mantel-piece.”

“Thanks,” replied Forbes. “I don’t know that it is quite a case in point, and Tom must forgive my rather throwing chaff at his heroics; but there was a case decided last week—a real good Chancery suit that had run some years. An acquaintance of mine was one of the interested people. It was a dispute

ters of religion are numerous who preach that chilling doctrine, a doctrine that hardens sinners and makes saints hypocrites.

Delpré winced a little at his sister's speech ; he was the least bit afraid of her, and, moreover, as is the case with all attacks that really tell, he felt there was a spice of truth in it.

"Well, Elisc, I sent up to inquire three times last week ; you know that I am a racing man, and that the business requires attention."

"I know, Ralph, that you are deaf to the voice of reason, let alone religion ; that you have chosen the broad path that leadeth to destruction, and that you are hour by hour hastening thither. I know that you sneer at my remonstrances, that the sight of you is but what the world calls the acknowledgment of another folly ; but which you know as well is but that of another crime. What want you here now ? Do you think anything you can say is likely to prove a consolation to what may prove a death-bed ? The old cry, I suppose you want assistance to enable you to reach that kingdom of the devil, for which you are striving, more speedily."

"If you mean that I want money, yes," replied Delpré, savagely, "if you mean that I came here to ask for it—no. I know your Christian charity too well. Your brother might die in a gutter, before the Reverend Ebenezer, or whatever his name is, should want anything."

"And wherefore not ?" blazed out Miss Delpré. "Why should I or my sister waste our substance in a miserable attempt to prolong your road to perdition, which properly applied may snatch brands from the burning ? Why should we furnish you money to indulge in your unholy pursuits, that might rescue sinners from destruction ?"

It was very seldom Delpré lost command of his temper. "Want of temper is want of pluck," was a favourite maxim of his ; but coupled with his well nigh desperate position, his sister's taunts stung him to madness.

"Curse it !" he rejoined fiercely, "don't waste your stereotyped

cant upon me. I tell you I didn't come here for money, at all events from you. As for my errors, you impressed them deep enough on my mind last time, and then you paid for it. Like most of your *protégés*, I don't stand prêaching without relief. Of course I want money, who does not in these days? but I didn't ask you for it, and unless you mean to volunteer it I am not going to stand the sermons."

"Ralph," said Miss Delpré, rising, "that you were lost I well knew, that you would insult your sister I had yet to learn—what your object may be in calling here I don't know. If it is to see Caroline, I tell you, you shall not. She is very ill, and shall not be disturbed by an interview with any one, whatever the relationship, in such a frame of mind as yourself."

"Stop," said Delpré, instantly recovering himself. "I apologise; but you goaded me too far, Elise. I have come here to see Caroline, and mean to do it. Things have gone badly with me of late, and my temper is none of the best at any time. I tell you I have no intention of bothering her in any way about money matters; but you would provoke a saint. I don't profess to be one of your elect, and, forsooth, you give me little chance of reformation. Abused the moment I call, and accused of mercenary motives before I can open my lips. Elise, you may be a good woman—I believe you are; but take my word for it, sinners never melt to harsh treatment. Did you ever mean seriously to reclaim your brother, you would never talk to him in the strain you have."

The bait took; the hardest women melt to soft words. Miss Delpré stopped at the door of the room, her very grey silk seemed to soften as her brother spoke. She felt that she had been hard upon him, and then what woman, with a religious vocation, could have withstood the hope, however indistinctly held out, of winning a proselyte. Yes, she might turn his heart, yet. It was left, perhaps, for her to show him the error of his ways. She was, as I have said, a good woman in the main. She sincerely meant to do good, much as she mistook

the way to do so. Most of that type of women do ; but heated imagination warps their pure womanly judgment. A really good woman, unperverted by religious acidity, is worth ten men in the distribution of charity. She feels intuitively what we blindly grope for. Her soft womanly ways win readily the confidence our roughness would vainly extort. To win the confidence of the poor is the first step towards judicious charity.

"Ah, well," she said, "perhaps, Ralph, I have been hard upon you ; but you must acknowledge you have given us little cause to judge you rightly. It is seldom you trouble us with your society unless necessities bring you here, and then, you know, your own short comings are generally the dismal topic of conversation. Heaven only knows either Caroline or myself would gladly rescue you from the awful people you live with, were it possible to do so !" Her harsh features softened here and became almost handsome as she spoke. "But you know as well as I do what it really is. Money given to you, to assist you, is so much more fuel thrown to the fires of your ungodliness."

"Don't preach, Elise, you know I can't bear it. Let me see Caroline, if she is well enough. I'll promise not to disturb her. You have been good sisters both in your way ; but your ways are not mine—the less we talk about it the better."

"Better for you, Ralph, if they were," she replied. "I'll see how Caroline is, and let you know in a few minutes," saying which she quitted the room.

Delpre's reflections were not pleasant. Whatever he might say, money he came for, and, *coûte qui coûte*, money he must have. Like most men on their way down hill, solitary contemplation was the last thing he coveted. He had too good a head not to see the folly of his career. Too clear an intellect not to see the future before him. He felt his gambling must beat him in the end, and what then was he fit for ? How many broken men have asked that question before ? How many

pause in dismay when they do ask it? What is there left for the ruined man of education? Do not believe in the colonies presenting an opening for him. The less the civilization the speedier is his destruction. Let us dismiss the subject. Have we not all seen cases too painful to think upon, where the lost one drowns his sense of degradation in strong waters, and seeks in intoxication the forgetfulness of what he once was? One has seen the once cheery companion of the dinner-table beg for a half-crown in the Haymarket, resolving it into gin before it had left the donor's hands ten minutes.

Delpré knew all this as well as most men; but what hung upon him more than ever, like a hideous blackness, was the fearful conviction that he was rapidly nearing Davidson. He felt, as if in a dream, that the time was quickly approaching when he should no longer be his master, but his brother in crime—bound hand and foot to a felon. It is true he had been associated with him in India in the blackest of transactions; still close as the shave had been, he had kept his caste.

Say what you will, men shudder horribly, aye! and women, too, at first losing their place in society; but the struggle once over

"Facilis descensus Avernî."

It is quicker with women than men. We struggle longer on the debatable ground; but the result is similar, though the iniquities of man will usually pale before those of a thoroughly corrupt woman. Women when they "go to the bad," are apt to do it with a vengeance.

"Ralph, you can see Caroline now. I will show you the way," said Miss Delpré, opening the door of the room; "but that is all you can do. She is asleep, and must not be awakened. I am going down stairs to get some tea. You can sit by her bed-side till my return; but mind, she must not be disturbed. Promise me that."

"Certainly," muttered Delpré, as he followed his sister to the

darkened chamber, in which science and constitution were battling with "the destroyer."

There is a sort of heavy miasma, perhaps more moral than physical, that hangs over the sick room—I mean of those sick unto death. We feel that we ourselves, though, perhaps, in strong health, are standing on the verge of the Shadowy Valley where the great problem is solved. We pause and wonder how we shall face our departure on that journey from whence there is no return. The most hardened of us then are apt to feel how little of good we have done—how little of good there is in us.

I don't suppose Delpré was much troubled with conscience; but to the most callous offenders come those rare intervals, not perhaps of repentance, but of feeling that we wish our life had been otherwise. It is more the conviction that our life has been a mistake, than any remorse for the sins we have committed. A sensation of weariness, a suspicion that *le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*, that those who live cleanly and honestly have, on the whole, a great deal the best of it steals in upon us; but we feel that it is too late. We are in the toils, and good resolutions are but mockeries. Our moral strength is exhausted, and we must need drift with the tide, our past life will brook no thinking over.

Delpré had long since crossed the Rubicon. Did the world but know the history of his past, and not a man of his acquaintance would have spoken to him—even as it was, they began to look rather shy at him. His position was getting more dubious daily. He was quite capable of any iniquity that would bring grist to the mill; but he still clung to his caste. He would still hold his place in society if he could. He felt a defalcation on settling day would finish him. He knew that he was on the verge of the quicksands that daily engulph those who can breast life's stream no longer. Sullenly he seated himself by the bed-side, and glanced at his sister.

She was sleeping—cheeks pale as marble—a tangled mass of dark hair, liberally streaked with grey, lay tossed over the

pillow. The white face had a strongly-marked resemblance to that of her sister Elise, the stern, well-marked brows were there, but there was a softness about the full lips and mouth that you looked for in vain in the face of either Ralph or Elise Delpré, and which betokened a feebler will and less harshness of character.

Delpré sat ruminating doggedly over his prospects, he was thinking, as men of his class ever do, much more of himself than of her. His dark eyes glanced keenly, though mechanically, round the room till they rested on an ebony cabinet, inlaid with silver, which stood upon the opposite table. He knew that cabinet well; how often had he seen his sister take from it the notes or the cheque-book that was to administer to his necessities. He wondered whether she had any money there now. His eye, still roving round the chamber, was caught by a bunch of keys on the dressing-table. There was no harm in looking. Silently he crossed the room—yes, he knew that quaint-looking key well. He was not particular, but he would have spurned the idea fiercely, if anybody had suggested to him that he contemplated robbery at that moment.

One glance at the sleeper, and the key was in the lock. It turned noiselessly. Contemptuously he tumbled over bundles of faded letters, broken fans, and a soiled glove or two. There were some few vouchers, and other legal-looking documents. One of the last, more fresh than the rest, attracted his attention. He took it up. "My last will and testament" caught his eye. Hurriedly opening it, and approaching the lamp, he ran it hastily over, and a muttered execration escaped his lips as he ascertained that Ralph Delpré would benefit not one shilling by that document.

"Ah!" he muttered. "Hospitals, Doctors, Refuges, and a mere fraction to Elise. My pious sister, I'll do you a good turn though I intend to 'stand in.' Caroline, you must live to make that over again, as I can't believe you mean to perpetrate so much injustice. No, sister *mia!*" he muttered, with a

vengeful sneer. "You cannot really mean to deal thus with your nearest of kin—an error of judgment that I shall correct, at all events, should the worst happen to you."

As he spoke, he continued his researches in the cabinet, thrusting the will into his pocket. He soon came across a small bundle of notes, which he also transferred without hesitation to his breast.

All the savage ferocity of his nature was aroused by the utter omission of his name from the will, and he felt a vengeful delight in the mere idea of out-witting his dying sister. Softly he closed the cabinet, replaced the keys on the dressing-table, and, with sneering lip, awaited the return of Miss Delpré.

He had not long to wait. With noiseless step she entered the sick room, casting a searching glance at the sleeper as she did so. The Countess was evidently undisturbed. Finger on lip, she approached her brother.

"You see, Ralph, it is impossible to speak to her," she whispered. "I am sorry for the harsh words I have used to you. She is in the hands of God. Would that I could say the same of you."

An impatient gesture from Delpré warned her not to dwell on that topic. Silently he accompanied her from the room.

"Good-bye, Elise," he said, in harsh, grating tones. "When next you've cause to think of your brother, think of him more charitably, if *you can*."

"Ralph, I have already said I am sorry—"

She might have said more, but the bitter sneer on his face, and the savage glitter of his eye awed her, though she was a woman not easily daunted.

"Send down to me if she is not better to-morrow," he continued, coldly. "In the meanwhile, good-night."

He lit a cigar when he reached the street, and walked moodily towards his lodgings.

"What a fool I am!" he muttered. "It is but a plunge after all! I am losing my nerve, I think. I ought still to be a

match for Davidson, and able to take care of myself. I know no other way to raise this money in time. He said his employers would come to my assistance. Bah ! it's only a question of the price. I can give a pretty good guess at theirs. I don't like it. If I knew any other way ; but I don't. I must yield to their terms in the end, so the sooner I swallow the pill the better. Sell, myself, body and soul, to a lot of Jew black-legs. Have to stand the brunt, and further a lot of their clumsy villainies. I am not squeamish, and one thing I must make them clearly understand is, that if I am to be useful, the less they compromise me in the eyes of the world, the more it will be to their advantage. They will never be such dolts as not to see that. This cursed will, too, I am not sure that I wasn't a fool to take that. It is an awkward thing to be found with ; however, that point is easily settled. Should Caroline recover, I am afraid they will conjecture how it was. If she don't, it's being done away with must leave Elise and myself joint heirs-at-law. Well, even if she lives to make another, I haven't hurt my prospects, that's certain."

With such like reflections did Delpré beguile his way homewards. On his arrival there, he immediately called for lights, and in less than five minutes the Countess's will was reduced to ashes.

CHAPTER XVI.

"MEN PROPOSE."

THE London season draws towards a close. All that restless whirl of froth and frivolity, heart-burning and disappointment, in a few more weeks will be over for the year. Make much of it, ye idlers, for many of you are enjoying your last season. Many a girl wishes an admirer a laughing farewell whom she shall never behold again in this world. For nearly forty years has the Temple of Janus been practically closed in England ;

but for the security engendered by this period of inaction, a practised ear might even now have noted the coming of the storm. A low fitful moaning comes ever and across the political sea; but the pilots have had fair weather so long, they smile at the "old world stories" of their fathers. Deeper, deeper growls the approaching storm. Lightlier still think Britannia's helmsmen of the squall. Make much of the last few weeks of the season, men, in whom the pulses of life beat strong, for ere another year has run ye will lie deaf and cold to what now makes your hearts bound. And you, lady fair, in the pride and insolence of your beauty, deal tenderly with thy disdained adorer, for shall not he and his more favoured rival be sleeping quietly on the banks of the Alma ere September passes twice. Many a careless Park loungee of that year sleeps the "sleep that knows no waking" in the grim cemetery of Cathcart's Hall, or 'neath the waving cypresses of Sentari.

The laugh and jest go on, and England still ignores the muttering thunder, and little recks the fierce struggle that this time next year shall find her committed to. Little think those smiling lips in Rotten Row that many of them shall turn white with anguish, ere many months be passed, as they read the sad bulletin of the Alma, or the ghastly story of Inkerman.

"The veil which covers futurity has been woven by the hand of mercy." Ah, see how that handsome girl on the blood bay mare checks her horse, and leans over to talk to that good-looking dragoon next the rails. Gossip has been busy about them the last six weeks. He called to say good-bye yesterday, and they meet once more. For many a year she'll recollect that parting. She's indignant with him for refusing to stay in town for some party towards the end of the week; she cuts her horse sharply with the whip as she rides on. She has seen him for the last time. She'll take up that dreadful copy of the *Times* and read how

"All in the valley of death rode the six hundred."

How broken and shattered by twos and threes they came back,
was not he!

A steed comes at morning no rider is there
But its bridle is red with the sign of despair

while he

Leaving in battle no blot on his name
Look proudly to Heaven from the death bed of fame

Alas! that coming year sent a wail through many a proud
house through many a country village, through many a
quiet manor-house through many a cottage home as the solemn
news came home how the Honourable Algernon and humble
Dick Styles had met their doom in the fierce struggle before
Sebastopol, or more luckless still had succumbed slowly to
disease in the long aisles of the Scutari Hospital Dread
stories were rife of want of food of want of clothes, of want
of fuel want of all the necessaries that sustain life, while still
the relentless trenches ever gaped for more victims, and the
shattered band dragged themselves forth once more to the
mouling cry of 'Get dressed, the covering party'

You may smile at those common place words, but to those
gallant but worn out men that cry had a fearful significance.
When dressing meant rising from your wet straw in your still
half dried clothes, and taking a musket, there was very little
to smile at

But I am anticipating, all this was still veiled in the future,
and the warm June sun shone brightly yet on the revellers of
the London season

Belle Bartley sat at breakfast in her pretty boudoir, or rather
sat skimming her letters at the breakfast table She and her
husband seldom met at this meal He had breakfasted, and
was off to his dearly loved City by ten every morning while it
was always close on eleven before Belle made her appearance.

"Good morning Breezie dear, she exclaimed, as Miss Lang-
ton entered the room 'Isn't this gorgeous for our Richmond

trip, and look, here's a pretty penitent note from Charlie Repton, apologising for not having called ; but he's heard of the

fully, never to call—such allies as we were too ;” and here Mrs. Bartley rested her pretty cheek on her hand and became wrapped in thought.

Breezie Langton, who was ignorant of her hostess's former relations with Repton, attached very little importance to the intelligence.

“Oh dear, Belle, the coffee is quite cold. I am awfully late, am I not ? you must give me some tea this morning, and don't look so serious because Charlie what's-his-name is coming. Perhaps he won't after all, men in London are not to be depended on, I have heard you say.”

“I think he'll come,” said Belle, in a dreamy voice as if to herself, and then she began to pour out the tea.

It was a pretty picture that breakfast-table. They contrasted well, those two : Belle, with her stately beauty, proud grey eye, regular features and raven tresses coiled into a coronel round her well-turned head. Breezie, with her lithe, girlish figure, and ever varying countenance, her brown eyes flashing with youth and high spirits, while the rebellious masses of soft brown hair defied all attempts to braid them soberly.

Their characters, too, were a contrast. Breezie, honest, warm-hearted, thoroughly unconventional, unused to society, with a strong spice of Bohemianism in her nature. Poor Belle was equally warm-hearted and unselfish ; but she had warred with the world, was worldly to the depths of her nature, and cynical to the extent two or three London seasons make one. She had many a scoff and affront to pay back that she had had to accept as the penniless Miss Brabazon, but which the wealthy Mrs. Bartley could settle for with interest ; on some of these small points Belle felt vengeful as an Indian, when she reflected on what her “dear friends” had made her go through at the time.

Yes, I doubt whether the North American Indians with their flaming javelins ever made those stout old French missionaries shrink, as "the women" do when they've got a sister fairly tied to the stake. Man may murder, but woman, where she hates, would always combine torture with it. It is difficult to gauge quite in society how that pleasant "carte and tierce" tells. Here is Phillis has it "up to the hilt," yet her face will give no sign till she reaches her bed-room this evening; but do not think any the less that Chloe does not know her thrust has gone home.

Slightly cynical, ever engaged in a species of guerilla warfare with the society in which she lived, Belle was also destitute of a material safeguard. She had no intimate female friend. Her marriage had been a most perfect *marriage de convenance*. She found connexion, *entrée* to the fashionable world, and a handsome face for the top of the dinner-table. He found money. Mammon was his god, and his thirst for gold insatiable. To do him justice, there was no avarice about him. Belle was welcome to spend money as fast as he could make it. Miss Brabazon, partially in self-defence, but also naturally, had been satirical. The world fears, and therefore hates, satire to which it is exposed. Cis Langton, in fact, was the only real friend Belle had. It is bad for a woman who does not care for her husband when she has no female friend of her own standing. Belle looked upon Breezie Langton naturally as a mere girl, as indeed she was. Belle at five-and-twenty, with her worldly experience, was a lifetime older than Breezie, ignorant of the great whirlpool, and but seventeen, though there are young ladies of seventeen who could give lessons, and sharp ones, too, to most of us.

The party were to muster at Belle's house, drive from thence to Richmond, dine and come home in the cool of the evening. With pleasant people, as pleasant a way as I know of passing a June afternoon, always supposing you can induce that capricious "old lady," the English climate, to accede to the arrange-

ment. And who were there? Well, in the words of Faote, "there were present at the wedding,"—stop, this is premature—there mustered soon after four the Clippington girls,—whom we have too long lost sight of,—radiant in smiles, silks, and bonnets; in short, armed at all points for conquest, from the neat boot to the delicate glove. Our esteemed but slightly heavy friends the Breretons,—father, mother, and daughter; Tom Lytlereck, much given to be found in the vicinity of Laura Clippington, that young lady, in her experience, having made little mistake when she described him as "hooked, my dear." But of late, things had progressed between them to that extent, that I doubt whether Laura would have alluded to it quite so lightly. She seemed disposed to be more in earnest than such a charming coquette ought to be. Looking, indeed, as if all her previous practice had been disgracefully thrown away.

Forbes, Jack Travers, and a couple of light-hearted young men from the public offices, whose sojourn in town had not yet been long enough to admit of the clouds incidental to an impecunious position. Charlie Repton had as yet not arrived, while Mr. Bartley had signified his intention of finding his way down alone, in time for a seven o'clock dinner.

Laura Clippington was looking extremely well; the dark blue eyes were dancing with fun, and the golden hair glistened in the sunshine. Laura's spirits were at the highest. Was she not embarked in a pleasant excursion? and was not somebody—well—whom she wanted—to be there?

You see Miss Laura is an especial pet of mine; and though I think, when she threw me over for that dance on account of handsome Jim Claxby, her conduct was not quite what it should have been to an old friend, how am I to blame her? I am fain to confess I am a middle-aged man, who ought to renounce all such vanities. Jim is twenty-five, has a well waxed moustache, and valsés smooth, fast and easy as an express train. It is true, I don't think much of Jim in an intellectual point of view (he calls me old boy, and evidently thinks it); yet I have no doubt

in a ball room, I should have to hunt closely among the dowagers before I found any one who thought me half as agreeable. Can I blame Miss Laura for that smiling, "I think you are mistaken ; at all events you won't mind."

Ah, my brethren, when pretty girls talk to you in this style, and are "sure you won't mind," take my advice and accept the situation at once. Drop back from the first flight and join us who look on ; you do not know the fun we have, we cannot perhaps win ourselves, but we have a deal to do with the race for all that. Those who have experienced our assistance will have grateful recollections of mammas and chaperons taken care of at critical moments. Of dangerous rivals whom we button-holed, took off to drink champagne, or otherwise made away with *pro tem*. If you want your praises judiciously sung to the woman you love, trust to the middle-aged rank. Their words have just weight enough if properly applied.

"Do you think it of any use giving Mr. Repton ten minutes more," inquired Belle of Jack Travers, "he told you positively he should come, did he not?"

"Oh dear, yes, Mrs. Bartley, he was decided enough about it when I saw him last ; but I shouldn't wait. Nobody ever does, you know, for Charlie ; I don't think he ever knows to within half-an-hour what o'clock it is."

"I'll ring for the carriages, then ; that will give him ten minutes more, at least. Come, Breezie, if Mrs. Brereton will excuse us, we had better get our bonnets."

On her return, Charlie was the first person she encountered.

"I must apologise for being late, but the fact is, I was detained by an unexpected visit from a very old friend, whom I have taken the liberty of bringing with me—Mr. Puzzleton."

The Professor bowed, and Belle smiled a welcome.

"I hope you won't mind, after all my shortcomings in the calling way," said Charlie, in a low tone ; "I know I deserve no indulgence ; but he is a very old friend, so visit your displeasure on me, please, and hold him guiltless."

"I can't say you deserve much consideration ; but I feel good-humoured to-day. I'm in the mood to be pleased with everything, and will have no clouds cast over this afternoon, at any rate—even the thunderstorm of wrath I have in store for you shall not descend till we reach Richmond, and then shall be a summer shower as far as possible."

"Who, and what is he?" inquired Breezie, attracted by the Professor, whose quaint, prim dress and spectacles certainly looked singular among the gay butterfly toilettes by which he was surrounded.

"Mathematics at home, and conundrums when he's out, and a dear good innocent soul besides," replied Tom Lyttlereck, "I must go and say how d'ye do to them."

"He's great fun," whispered Laura. "He's mad upon riddles. We met him at Ryalston, in the country you know, last winter. Minnie and I used to lie awake half the night inventing outrageous conundrums for him."

"Carriages at the door, ma'am," announces a tall footman.

The start was easily organised, Mrs. Bartley showing herself to be the pink of chaperons on the occasion. We know, if not injudiciously interfered with, how pleasantly the party could pair off, and Belle was too good a tactician to throw out more than an occasional hint to the outsiders of the social drama.

I can't ; who could follow a gathering of this kind through the afternoon. We all know the endless nothings, the mild jokes, the little *contretemps*, the pleasant conversation, which make up such sunny hours on these occasions ; but which if placed upon paper would fill our very souls with ennui, let alone indignation, that that could be anything like a true description of what took place.

My dear young lady, a report of that twenty minutes you passed in the conservatory with—— pshaw, can I not keep a secret!—would make you yawn if you saw it printed. Yet how you both enjoyed it at the time. What unchristian-like feelings you both bore to that placid old gentleman, who,

curious in camellias, eventually interrupted you. An acquaintance of mine once made a friend for life, through his presence of mind on one of these occasions. It was at a large ball given in a very extensive suite of apartments; not only that, but smaller rooms had been also thrown open for purposes of lounging and flirtation. My friend was foremost of a considerable party about to enter one of these rooms. As his foot crossed the threshold, he turned abruptly, and closing the door behind him with a slam, said—

"Oh dear, we are evidently not intended to go in there."

They moved off in another direction. His eye had caught on the central ottoman the unconscious tableau of a gentleman with his arm round a young lady's waist, and engaged apparently—well—in "telling her secrets."

I know another man whose inopportune glance through the crack of a door was never forgiven.

Depend upon it, you cannot be too blind on these occasions to matters which do not concern you.

Dinner is over, and the party is strolling about, enjoying the delicious coolness of the evening. The fresh country air seems so invigorating after hot dusty London. On one of the terraces looking over the river lounged a merry group, of which Minnie Clippington and Puzzleton formed the centre. Minnie had made great friends with the Professor down at Ryalston. She delighted in his eccentricities, and collected most wondrous riddles and charades for his delectation. She, Frank Forbes, and two or three others, were now engaged in fabricating the most outrageous conundrums to the Professor's immense delight.

"Now, Mr. Puzzleton," she exclaimed, "here is another for you. Why should an avaricious man furnish a sitting-room well?"

"An avaricious man furnish a sitting-room? Let me see. why, he would be careful of his money. No, that won't do, eh? Let's see."

"Quite right—don't be provoking ; you did that on purpose, pretending not to see it exactly. Because he's so chafy with his money. Now, Mr. Forbes, it's your turn."

"Well, really, Miss Clippington, I don't think we can acknowledge that last."

"Nonsense. I think it very good ; don't you, Mr. Puzzleton ?"

Forbes now essayed, producing two or three such disgraceful attempts, that even his aider and abettor, Minnie Clippington, was forced to admit that she could not see the "because" in them ; while Puzzleton glanced at him in a commiserating manner, expressive of his feelings for a man who was so little in accord with the great art of conundrum making.

"Stop," said Forbes, "I have it ; here's one really that's worthy of a prize medal. Good enough to send to *Punch*, and not be put in ; there's no nonsense about this. I can't quite make them so quick as you do ; but there's a deal of finish about this—it's classical, in short."

"If you don't ask it directly, I shan't believe you have one," said Minnie.

"Listen then, it's not an easy one. Disgusted with the self-complacency of Tennyson's 'Brook,' irritated at the egotism with which it announces—

" ' Men may come, and men may go,
But I flow on for ever !"

"How would you put it down ?"

For a minute there was silence, broken at length by a peal of laughter from Minnie Clippington.

"Mr. Forbes—how dare you ! Don't try it, Mr. Puzzleton ; the answer is dreadfully improper. It's a bad riddle in every sense of the term."

"Really, Miss Clippington," said Forbes, with mock gravity ; "I don't quite understand you. Perhaps we are drawing different deductions from the same premises. Your meaning's not my meaning. Your answer's not my answer."

left, but says he will call again in the evening. You will find Miss Elise in the drawing-room, unless she's with the Countess."

Delpre ascended the stairs and entered the drawing-room.

"How do you do, Ralph?" said Miss Delpre as she rose to receive him. "It is some time since we saw you. I suppose a man so infatuated with horse-racing can hardly find time to inquire after a dying sister; the result of the Derby is naturally of more consequence than the life or death of his nearest kith and kin."

Elise Delpre was a stern woman of eight-and-forty, or thereabouts. She was very like her brother; hard black eyes and strongly marked eyebrows were common to both. She had been reputed a beauty in her youth, though always of the masculine type; but whether she flew too high a kite or what, I don't know, she was left like many others ungathered; perhaps, the severe black eye, joined to an off-hand manner, scared men. To a physiognomist she certainly looked like having a will of her own. However, there was the fact, she was Miss Delpre still, and likely to remain so. Not having fulfilled her mission of matrimony, which the lights of this age tell us is what woman was sent into the world to do, she had fallen back, as so many are apt to, on a constrained view of piety and benefiting her fellow-creatures. Good women these might be, had destiny married them to over-worked clergymen or struggling men without a shilling, where their natural affections would have free play; but in default of this, they take to tracts and acidulated religion.

They mean well, poor souls; but the milk of human kindness has curdled. We must go to heaven by their own ascetic road, or not at all, and God help the poor dance-loving nieces who may fall into their hands. "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity," is their pet text. Mistaking cant for religion, they denounce all innocent amusements as mere snares of the ungodly, and arrive at that last wretched state, of thinking that happiness means wickedness. It is not altogether their own fault, for the minis-

"Miss Langton, I want you to do me a favour. Will you give me something as a memento of that day? You don't know how I should value it. If I dared, I would ask for something more. Give me a remembrance of our first meeting, when you said I should wear your colours."

"What can I give you?" said Breezie, blushing. "I told you we don't do such things in these matter-of-fact days."

"Well," said Jack, speaking fast. "We will make an exchange. Give me your neck-ribbon. Say you won't quite forget me, and wear this, please, as a slight remembrance of one who will never forget you."

Breezie opened her eyes wide—flushed slightly—slowly unknotted the blue ribbon round her throat, and handed it to Jack, receiving in return a thin gold chain from which hung a small plain gold cross.

"Will you wear that for me?"

The girl said nothing, but clasped the chain round her neck.

A silence came over those two as they leaned over the balustrade, and looked out on the river now glittering in the clear moonlight.

Breezie's face was thoughtful. She had liked Travers extremely, but had as yet thought of him in no other way. Now it flashed upon her that he would demand more than that from her; her mind was troubled, for in good earnest she felt that she did not know what her mind was on that subject. 'Let me be alone and think,' is the cry that would have risen to her lips.

Jack was too much in earnest to press his advantage. As we all do when deeply stirred, he feared to try for too much, so he rested triumphant on the blue ribbon he had gained, and, like his companion, looked out into the moonlight.

Wandering still further from the laughing group where Minnie Clippington plays the Sphinx to Puzzleton's *Œdipus*, are another couple, whose light jesting seems gradually approaching to earnest.

"Glorious night!" said Tom.

"In such a night
Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew
And with an unthrif love did run from Venice."

"Nently quoted, Mr. Lyttlereck. Poor Jessica; I wonder whether she ever found out Lorenzo was only in love with her money. I daresay he ill-treated her afterwards."

"Sorry for you, Miss Laura; but your sex are not always paragons. Thomas Ingoldsby, an antiquarian of deep research, hath recorded,—

"That Jessie, coquettish and vain,
Gave her husband, Lorenzo, a good deal of pain,
Being mildly rebuked she levanted again,
Ran away with a Scotchman, and crossing the main,
Became known by the name of the Flower of Damblane."

"She did nothing of the sort, and Thomas Ingoldsby was a heretic to say so. I don't believe a word he wrote."

"Well, I've known people hint that Shakespeare romanced a little."

"There, that will do," said Laura, laughing. "You always chaff me till you make me in earnest, and then this is the way you treat one."

"Ten thousand pardons! say, what shall we talk about?"

"A pretty question to ask, indeed. Didn't you promise to be amusing when we strolled down here? and haven't you *me* to talk about?" inquired Laura, her blue eyes dancing mischievously. "Do you think a woman ever gets tired of hearing her perfections dwelt upon? Eh, sir?"

"No; I believe not, or else you ought to be. Have I not for months been singing your praises. Swearing you looked like an angel and danced like a sylph."

"Considering the dances I have given you lately, I think that's the least you can say for me. Why don't you add, my temper's seraphic, that I ride like Diana, and that you rather prefer my singing to Grisi's?"

"Because you didn't give me time," said the unabashed Tom. "You are so impetuous ; you never wait to hear me sing your praises properly."

"Well, then, I will ; begin, and I'll listen attentively."

"Agreed—you are not to interrupt me. Now listen. Stop ; do you know this glove ?"

"Yes, you took it from me at the end of Mrs. Briarley's ball. I don't know what for. To cover a pipe, most likely."

"Yes, quite likely ; don't interrupt me again. Men always ask for trifles from women they love, for some such frivolous purpose. Do you want to hear your own perfections ? You have a warm, generous heart in spite of your coquetry. A clear sensible head, not turned by the somewhat frivolous life you lead. Last, though not least, you've the softness and enthusiasm of a true woman, and could be as thoroughly self-sacrificing as any woman I ever knew."

Nothing about—nothing, I mean—" and Laura stopped dead short, for she felt that Tom was speaking in earnest.

"And now, Laura, I asked you for the glove before. Will you give me the hand that wore it ? You know I love you—have known it longer than I have, though I believe I have loved you from the time I first saw you. Tell me, darling ?" and Tom caught her hand.

She snatched it away, and turned half from him (coquette to the last).

"Answer me quickly, you don't mean that I am mistaken ? Laura, if I am, it will be a sad drive home for me to-night. Tell me I am not a conceited fool. Surely—"

Where Tom's eloquence was about to carry him, I don't know, but Laura turned suddenly round, placed her two hands in his, while the arch blue eyes, marvellously softened, looked up into his face.

Their lips met ; as she drooped her head upon his shoulder, she whispered—

"Now, Tom, dear, you're never to tease me again. I only hope you will find me half you say I am."

"Mine, darling, now, for ever!" was the rejoinder.

But Mrs. Bartley gives the signal for retiring. She and Charlie Repton seem to have quite made up their quarrel, and to be once more on the old familiar footing. Some of the party are very quiet on that homeward drive, and with the exception of the carriage which contained Frank Forbes, Minnie Clippington, and the Professor, accusations of sleepiness might most unjustly have been attributed to the whole party.

Then came adieux. Minnie Clippington sent the Professor off with an impossible riddle, to which no answer has been devised to this day. A pressure of the hand at parting spoke volumes to Tom Lyttlereck. While Jack Travers, as he smoked his cigar on his way to the Thermopolium, pondered delightedly over a soft "Good-night, Mr. Travers, I sha'n't forget you."

"Most superior young woman, that Miss Clippington, Repton," said the Professor. "If she had but given attention to them, I daresay she would have been as clever at quadratics as she is at conundrums."

Oh woman, woman! When one thinks what a little sends some of us to our beds rejoicing, how can you reconcile it to yourselves ever to be cruel.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THE THREE CROCUSES."

LONDON is getting hotter and hotter. People begin already to think of the Moors, the country, and the sea-side. Jack Travers, seated in a first-class carriage, absorbed in tobacco and reverie, on his way back to Milton, feels far from grateful for past mercies. Few of us perhaps do, we are generally more grateful in anticipation than in retrospect, and Jack, sanguine

as he is, can hardly look at this in the light of "a good thing." Orderly duty and such society as a small country town affords, looked certainly tame, flat, and insipid after London, with its pleasant parties, afternoons and evenings with Mrs. Bartley, Breezie Langton, the Clippingtons, &c. He puffed savagely at his cigar, muttered something extremely uncomplimentary to the profession to which he belonged, then he thought of that last evening at Richmond, and felt that he had something to live for and look forward to.

Live and look forward ! aye, for they tell us in these high-pressure days we have not much to look forward to after thirty. At all events you are supposed to have got through all your sensations by that time. The *nil admirari* was never more in the ascendant. We rather follow our American cousins in wanting everything on a sensational scale, principally to show how perfectly unmoved we can be thereat. Your eye-lash must not move at "Niagara" nor your pulse at "Enoch Arden." High civilization, as some one says, verges in its stoicism on those early days of society—

"When wild in woods the noble savage ran."

Picking his way down a small street off Holborn, with his face set hard and stern, went Delpré on that same evening. He had to make frequent inquiries for the place he sought, and two or three false casts had not improved his temper. At last he stopped at a tavern bearing over it a sign, on which was delineated apparently the *Fleurs de lys*, but which the gilt letters beneath informed you was designed for "The Three Crocuses." It was a queer old-fashioned house, and had doubtless flourished as a French Hostelry in the days of the Stuarts, under the name of the *Fleurs de lys*—had gradually become first The Flowers, then under a landlord, with a spirit of classification if not botany, The Crocuses, and latterly had settled down into "The Three Crocuses."

It was a peculiar house too in the way of trade ; what is

called the counter business, seemed conducted with a rather better class than are accustomed to be met with at the bar of a tavern of this description. The police would have told you that the frequenters of the back parlours were, as a rule, not a very reputable set. They who ate, drank, smoked and sometimes gambled in those back parlours were all, if not absolute infringers, yet men who lived upon the extreme verge of the law. Occasionally one of their number would make a slip, and get the wrong side the boundary, and be what is technically called "wanted." In such cases he generally abandoned "The Crocuses" till the storm blew over; it being an understood thing among the frequenters of that hostelry that no seizure should take place on the premises.

How this understanding had originated, it would be hard to say,—perhaps with the landlord, who, for the sake of his house, might object to a positive offender against the laws being found therein; perhaps with the customers themselves, who had good reasons for wishing no incursions of the police on their privacy; but, however that may be, one thing is certain, that it would have been a breach of etiquette to be arrested at "The Crocuses."

The frequenters of the house were principally bill-discounters, betting-men of the lower grade, hell-keepers, horse-copers, crafty fences, &c., the lecs of society—leeches ever thirsting, ever craving for prey. "Mysterious parties" were continually being inquired after at the bar, in the gruffest of voices, and most melodramatic of manners. Low, indistinct allusions to brindled bitches, curby hocks, crosses, plants, seemed to be the ordinary staple of conversation in front of the counter. The very air seemed redolent of villainy.

After a moment's pause Delpré entered, and found himself in the midst of a group of dram drinkers. He glanced at the presiding goddess, a nymph all eyes, ringlets, and impudence, and hesitated before making inquiries. Not so she of the ringlets. At a glance she saw Delpré was a gentleman, so putting

on her sweetest smile, she opened a small door at the end of the counter, and said—

“Won’t you step inside, sir?” :

“Thanks,” said Delpré, “I only wanted to ask—”

“In one moment,” interrupted the young lady. “What for you, sir?” she continued to some fresh arrivals. “Six of pale, and a quartern of gin—yes, sir,—six and three’s nine, thank you, sir. What did you say you wanted?” turning to Delpré.

“Give me some brandy and water, please.”

Perfectly oblivious of the fascinating smile with which his order was complied with—an indifference which made ‘her of the ringlets’ toss her head indignantly,—Delpré sat lost in thought. He was on the verge of the fatal plunge; he still hesitated to make it; a few minutes more, perhaps, and he would be hopelessly in the hands of Davidson and his associates. But he had thought that well over before he came; there was nothing else for it—money he must have—these men would probably find it for him. They wanted him for purposes of their own. He knew thoroughly well they would exact their pound of flesh to the last ounce; in short, that he would be bound to them hand and foot, and destined henceforth to obey their behests. He was not very particular, goodness knows, but he felt that what they would require at his hands would speedily drive him outside “the pale.” Nevertheless the die was cast; he had made up his mind, though he could not refrain from a shudder on the brink of the quick-sands.

Finishing his brandy and water, he inquired—“Has Mr. Dawson been here to-day?”

“I think he is here now, if you mean a tall, pale-faced gentleman, with light blue eyes,” replied the barmaid. “Joe,” she continued, addressing a shock-headed pot-boy, “run up to the blue parlour, and see if Mr. Dawson is there; there’s a lot of gents there, I know; tell him there’s a gentleman wants him—any name, sir?”

"No, that'll do," and Delpré lit a cigar and awaited the return of his messenger.

He had not to wait long; the boy soon returned with an intimation that Mr. Dawson was there, and "the gent" was to step that way. *Following his guide up a flight of stairs, and up and down two or three long, rambling passages, he at length arrived at a door, through which came sounds of conviviality.*

"There y'are, governor. Yer'll find Dawson up at the far end," and with this, the ingenuous youth threw open the door, and retired.

Delpré's entrance undoubtedly produced a sensation. He was evidently one of the uninitiated, and few, if any of that assembly, could have dared to be convivial except among their co-mates in crime. Ever jealous, ever fearful of betraying their secrets, even their debauchery was a fitful, half sullen, half savage orgie. Each man kept a certain guard on his tongue, lest that should pass his lips that his comrades might trade on. The laughter was hushed, glasses were set down untouched, dogged smoking and watchful glances succeeded to the ribald song or jest, as, perfectly unmoved, Delpré made his way slowly up the room until he recognised Davidson.

"Delpré, by Jove!" roared the latter worthy, as he sprang from his chair to welcome his former ally—he had had no idea that the gentleman wanting to see him had been Delpré. "So you've found us at last, have you? You must take us in the rough. If we'd known you intended honouring us, we'd have had a private apartment ready for your worship."

There was an evil sneer as he spoke, that boded ill for Delpré, as far as he might influence any future arrangement, and a malicious glitter in the cold blue eyes not pleasant to look upon.

"I want to speak to you on business. Where can we go?"

"Nowhere at present. So sit down—or rather, it's not my

pleasure to devote to business for the next half-hour. Call for what you like, and do as we do—enjoy yourself."

Delpré threw himself mechanically into a chair, and glanced round the room.

A prettier collection of villainy it would have been hard to select. That high cheek-boned, clean-shaved man, with cord trousers buttoning over his ankle boots, is quite a king among horse-copers, while the grizzled old Hebrew, with the shaggy eye-brows, next him, is as clever a fence as any in London. They are men of mark in their vocations. The Hebrew deals only on a large scale; he scorns old spoons and bandanas, but does business with the top of the profession when they have gutted a jeweller's shop, or "lifted" the plate of a family mansion. There again you may see the restless-eyed betting-man, his glance ever wandering, his ear ever on the *qui vive*; while that little shabby man, with the bead-like eyes, and the falsetto querulous voice, is one of the most acute, grasping, and merciless bill discounters in London. There, too, is a specimen of the Jewish sporting publican, that swarthy man, with the flash scarf and gorgeous He is connected a good deal with the, and is one of what are denominated the of the Ring. He has, perhaps, (to use the vernacular of the P.R.) "stood in" with "more crosses" than any man of his time.

"Delpré," said Davidson, at length, "you may as well know my partner in business, Mr. Hart."

Delpré nodded to a fat, florid man with heavy eyebrows, thick, unctuous lips, and a slight cast in his eye, seated just opposite, and thought he looked a most unpromising man to do business with; at the same time he had a confused idea that he had seen the face somewhere before, and that under unpleasant circumstances.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, Captain," said Mr. Hart. "Often heard of you before, from our friend Dawson, here, as a man as was up to every move on the board. Pity

we didn't meet a little sooner ; you could have done me a good turn or two this year, and I could have told you that Danebury was no good for Epsom."

"I suppose so," sneered Delpré ; "it's astonishing the number of men I've met since the Derby, who were in possession of that information."

"S'elp me, bob !" quoth Mr. Hart, energetically ; "I know'd it right along."

"Ah, well, I don't dispute your information ; but that I'm not given to talking over the past, or whimpering over spilt milk, I think your friend there can inform you."

"No," grinned the other ; "I'll acquit you of that. You never halloed when you got squeezed."

Mr. Hart looked rather sulky at the way his friendly overtures had been met, and exchanged a sinister glance with Davidson, or Dawson, as he now called himself. Once more the trio relapsed into silence. Delpré smoked on, and listened to the conversation round him.

"The Coper" was narrating, with infinite gusto, a series of transactions that he and some confederates had successfully carried out with regard to the buying and selling of a fine-

five-and-twenty *quid* a sale. Each time we got him back for seven or eight. He'd smashed two traps right up, and shook an elderly gent in spectacles, all to pieces. So they was all glad to get out of him any way. He was a good-looking, taking horse, and the fourth time he went for thirty. I walked up to the fellow as bought him, told him civil as possible he'd been done, and I didn't mind stretching a point, and giving him nine sovs. for the horse back again, as he was a real useful horse to my party. Well, d—d if the ungrateful beggar didn't talk of giving me in charge of the police ! Of course, that was all gammon, he hadn't bought the horse of me. Some people won't let you do 'em a good turn. I heard afterwards, the

horse came down with him like a cart-load of bricks in a Whitechapel, that week, and that the trap alone would cost a fiver to put to rights. Now, I'd have kept him out of that expense, having no relations in the coach-building trade."

A sympathetic grin showed the appreciation of his auditory.

"What about that cross of Bob Stukeley's?" inquired another;
"you must have dropped your money on it, Simmonds?"

Mr. Stukeley was a pugilist, who had resigned a contest the week before, under rather exceptional circumstances.

"Not exactly," replied the Hebrew publican, before mentioned. "You see, we didn't think much of Bob's winning from the first; so we merely backed him not to be licked in an hour and a half, and as we gave the other a little something not to force the fighting—it wasn't a bad thing. Of course Bob didn't see any good in getting knocked about any more after the time was up, so he sprained his wrist pretty quickly. 'Those accidents will happen,' and the P.R. Corinthian winked pleasantly at the inquirer. "Come, send the liquids along—tip us a chant, somebody. Here, Bill Gosling, pour out something melodious."

"Don't see it, I ain't in singing trim," replied that worthy ;

Delpré hastily declined, looking extremely indignant at the proposition.

This was not lost on Davidson, his vindictive nature gloated over the petty annoyance even this was to Delpré. He had not forgotten the treatment he had received both at Milton and Epsom, moreover his first grand fall in the social scale had been that business in India. It had ever rankled in his breast that Delpré had come scatheless out of that affair, while he and another, dismissed from their profession, sailed for England, hopelessly disgraced, dishonoured men, with a stigma attached to their names that never could be lived down. How rapid had been his descent none but himself could have ever guessed.

He longed to drag Delpré down to his own level, and savage curses rose to his lips whenever he thought of the uneven justice that had been dealt out between them. True, he admitted that had Delpré on that occasion fallen like himself, it would not have saved or benefited him; but his sullen observation always was, "We were both in it, and we ought to have stood the same consequences."

"I'm afraid you don't quite like our society, perhaps we're not quite respectable enough. Sorry I don't mix in better circles, but I should think this might do for you."

"You don't suppose I come to a place like this for pleasure, do you?" said Delpré; "I come on business, and the sooner you're ready to attend to it the better."

"Well, you must wait. I'm taking my pleasure now, and I'll see business d—d first."

"Very well," said Delpré, "then I'll wait no longer."

The other rose, he would have rejoined had he dared; but he read in Delpré's face that he meant what he said. With all his hatred of him, there had always been a mixture of admiration for his cleverness and *hardiesse*. He was, moreover, a little afraid of him, the bolder spirit naturally asserted itself. Besides, he was extremely anxious to see Delpré in the hands of himself and his associates, and he was not as yet.

"I suppose you consider this gentleman necessary to our interview?" inquired Delpré, nodding towards Hart, who was following them.

"Yes, if you want money, and you'd hardly have come to look for me under any other circumstances. He'll have to find it, if it is found, so he may just as well know all about it first as last. You may take your oath he won't find it till he sees his way."

As he said this, he threw open the door of a snug-looking little room, though somewhat roughly furnished. It was evidently either the sanctum of himself or one of his companions. Numbers of "Ruff" Return Lists, Sporting papers, and a

couple of dirty packs of cards, strewed the table. Short pipes and two or three empty tumblers decorated the mantelpiece, while a full-sized roulette board leant against the wall.

"Sit down, gentlemen, and make yourselves at home," said Davidson, while he groped in a cupboard, from whence he eventually produced a black bottle and some clean glasses. It was evidently quite contrary to the etiquette of "The Crocuses" to do business except under the benign influence of strong waters.

"Well," said Delpré, breaking silence, "the sooner I state what I want the better. Money. Davidson there, says you or some of your friends will find it on certain terms. What are they?"

"How much is the money, and what is the security?" inquired Mr. Hart.

"You talk like a fool, sir," was the rejoinder. "Had I any security to offer, do you think it likely I should have come to you? You are not talking to a boy doing his first bill."

Davidson chuckled visibly.

"No need for getting angry, Captain," replied Hart, perfectly unmoved. "We'll let alone the security, what's the figure?"

"Eleven hundred, and cash, mind, whatever I sign to. You know what you want in lieu of security, or you wouldn't have told him," here Delpré glanced contemptuously at Davidson, "to bring me here if possible. You equally know if I could have raised the money in any other way I shouldn't be here."

"Eleven hundred's a deal of money," said Mr. Hart, musingly. "I didn't think it was as bad as that."

"You thought to buy me cheaper, no doubt. You can't, for if I have any idea of what you will want of me, you must pay that, or I'm no good to you."

"Suppose we say six down, and the other in three months."

"Not a bit of use. My outstanding account in the Ring has gone on too long, and I fancy my credit there must be good for what you want."

"Dawson, my boy, you were quite right, he's a long-headed man this ; but no, I see how it is, you're 'standing in' together ; you told him our little game, eh ?"

"I told him nothing of the sort," replied Davidson. "I told him after Epsom I knew how hard he was hit. I guessed if nothing turned up he would have run his tether pretty shortly, knew he was just the man you wanted, and told him to come to me. He was on his high horse then, and didn't take it at all kindly. In fact, if he could have behaved badly to an old friend, I should say he felt inclined to that day. Talked all sorts of absurdities, even of going for the moral dodge, and putting down our friend there ;" and Davidson grinned and jerked his thumb in the direction of the roulette board.

"It's not worth while wasting time in idle palaver," said Delpré, "make up your mind about the money, when you've done that we'll talk about terms."

Mr. Hart smoked on in solemn silence for nearly five minutes, unbroken by either of his companions. His mind was pretty well made up, but he felt a little uneasy as to whether Davidson had not communicated a little more than was absolutely necessary. It's true he had a pretty strong hold on that worthy. Still Delpré and he were old friends, and Delpré's apparently accurate divination of what would be required of him rather staggered Mr. Hart. At the same time, the acuteness he displayed showed what an invaluable accomplice he might be. He thought Delpré was pretty accurate when he said that unless he was put straight with the betting ring, his usefulness would be much circumscribed. It would never do for his credit to be shaky there. He balanced all these things, and finally came to the conclusion that if he could get sufficient hold upon Delpré the advance would pay, heavy as it was. As that conclusion invariably guided all his undertakings, he finally resolved to try it.

Proprietor of a gaming-table, a bill discounter, and low turfite, Mr. Hart made apparently very dangerous advances at times ;

but it was seldom in one way or another that he did not contrive they should turn out eminently to his advantage. He had the scent of a sleuth hound for forged paper, and was fonder of that than perhaps any other investment. He was wont to say, no bills were more strictly paid if you liked to part with them, and they always carried a handsome *douceur* besides. Davidson he had picked up and made one of his creatures, having quite enough against him to consign him to prison or the hulks at any moment.

While his antagonist, for so we may term him, was lost in such thoughts as these, Delpré had been studying his face attentively, and racking his memory under what circumstances he had before seen it.

At last a ray of recognition flashed across him. For a moment his dark eyes glittered, then his face relapsed into the set expression it had worn all along. Davidson, who was watching him closely, observed but failed to construe it, while Mr. Hart, absorbed in his own calculations, did not perceive it, otherwise, like most of his class, he was quick at reading the countenances of his fellow-men.

"Well," said the latter, "you shall have the money. It's hard to get, and I don't quite know how I'm to come by it."

An impatient gesture here warned him to stop all the old bill discounting "patter," which he was about to indulge in more from habit than anything else.

"Now we come to the security. It's not likely I'm going to find you eleven hundred pounds for love, or even on your own personal security, which, without offence, may be described as both weak and unnegotiable. To begin with, you shall give me bills for two thousand at three months, renewable without bonus for three more," and here Mr. Hart paused.

"You had better go on, it's the after part of your precious proposition that I want to hear most."

"Well, then, Captain, the fact is, you can be useful to us in the betting ring, in race riding, in—"

"Which means," interrupted Delpré, "that Mr. Bowdler, who was warned off the heath at Newmarket for the Belshazzar robbery, wants a reliable agent at Tattersall's to help him in his transactions! Go on."

Hart started; the affair alluded to had taken place many years back, and had fallen under Delpré's notice during a run home from India. Hart had thought it past the ken of most turfmen of the present day. As for Davidson, he opened his eyes wide with astonishment as to a thing he had evidently never heard of.

"Go on," said Delpré, again. "It will save time and trouble if you understand at once I know you, and pretty nearly what terms you want to make with me. You needn't mince matters. If there were any need of that I shouldn't be here."

"Captain, you're a deep 'un," replied Hart, struck with admiration of the other's cool daring. "You must help us in the Ring. You must do a bit of riding for us, and of course I expect you to bring custom to the tables."

"Good: now I'll tell you what I will do. I'll give bills for fifteen hundred, and renew if they're not paid, which you know they won't be, for sixteen. I also contract to bet for you, to pull your horses for you, what you mean by riding, I suppose, and to turn bonnet in your interests. Now, mark me, I've been a freebooter in my time, but if I'm to turn arrant robber I'll have my share of the plunder. Don't think you can treat me as you do that fool there. If you try to put the double on me, don't cry out if you find yourself in trouble. If you run straight with me, I'll do the same with you, whatever name other people may give it. One word more, when you're in possession of the screw, don't turn it too tight. You might wrench it, and I'm dangerous at bay. I can just conceive it possible, if you make me feel the collar too severely, that I might see no other way of extricating myself than by cutting your throat, and by G—d, I hardly recommend you to trust to my nerve failing me."

The fierce glitter of his eyes, and the savage energy with which he uttered the last words made the bill discounter instinctively draw his chair back, nor was Delpré's mocking laugh calculated to reassure him.

"It can't be done, it can't indeed; s'help me, I lost money on a better thing than this the other day. I ain't going to try to take you in, Captain, but the venture won't do."

"Of course it won't if it can be done cheaper; but you see it can't. Those are my terms, and though I say it, I'm cheap to you at the money. I'll give you," here he took a cigar from his case, "while I smoke this to think it over; but know deuced well you mean closing, and so do I. The less time you waste the better."

In vain did Mr. Hart recapitulate the badness of the times, the tightness of the money market, the weakness of the security, the risk he ran and his resolution to have nothing to do with the transaction. Delpré smoked quietly on, merely once suggesting that he was wasting a deal of time and energy.

It may be questioned why Mr. Hart indulged in all this useless oratory. He knew, just as well as Delpré did, that the bills would never be paid. It was a mere case of paying eleven hundred pounds for the Captain's assistance. It is true he looked at the bills with a certain amount of misgiving, but the bills were merely a slight hold on him, that was all, and for that the exact sum was very little consequence. Still, as Jonathan Wild could not refrain from trying the Count's pockets, though he knew there was nothing in them, so Mr. Hart could not refrain from going through the usual jargon of his trade, useless though he knew it to be.

Before the conclusion of the cigar he had yielded to Delpré's terms, the money was to be forthcoming on the next day, and the bills ready for signature.

"Good-bye," said Delpré. "I have sold myself to you as much as ever did Faust to Mephistophiles. What your first

move is, you can tell me to-morrow. You see I am ready to render service at once," and nodding carelessly to Davidson, he left the room.

Hart shook his head, wondered he had never heard of Melistophiles in the trade, and then, accompanied by Davidson, also took his departure.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"BENEDICT, THE MARRIED MAN."

THE windows are open, and the lazy twitter of the sparrows floats through Tom Lyttlereck's rooms in the Temple. That low querulous twitter which you may notice among the smaller birds in the July and August heat, which seems to say, "oh, do let me alone, it's too hot for anything." The hum of the great city, a little mellowed there, seemed to influence one like the monotonous turns of a water-mill. Have you never sat down on a summer's afternoon and heard a water-mill going on. Six hundred and one, and two, and three glug, and four glug glug. Six hundred and five glug glug, and six glug, as if contrary to the prescribed rule, it was trying to keep itself awake by counting and testifying by its spasmodic glugs how signally it was failing in the attempt. The flies seemed to have given it up as too hot, and only occasionally indulged in a feeble crawl, while that most excitable of creation, the fussy blue-bottle, gave vent to his uneasiness in a drowsy buzzing very different to his usual irascible bounce and fume. Plethoric spiders looked dreamingly at entangled insects, as if musing as to when they should muster sufficient energy and appetite to rush in and finish them.

Lolling in easy chairs with unbared throats, and clad in the loosest and lightest of attire, were Tom Lyttlereck and Forbes languidly smoking.

"It's a curious thing," remarked Tom, after a silence of some length, he had just been confiding his engagement to his friend, "it's a curious thing that when a man is engaged, the whole circle of his acquaintances seem intuitively to know it. Is the fact perceptible on his countenance, or is it his sensitiveness to the imputation that makes him think people aware of it?"

"I'm sure I can't say ; you see, Tom, I've never tried the experiment, so don't know even whether I am justified in admitting your statement."

"You'll find it out all in good time, old fellow. Now what should have made Reardon, a man I seldom do more than nod to, stop me yesterday and tell me that story of some wedding he'd been at last year. Did he know from my face that I was about to commit matrimony?"

"Don't know ; what was his story, eh—funny !"

"Well, you might think so ; six weeks ago I should, perhaps ; but now you see everything's different."

"Go on, let's hear it."

"His story was this, 'he was down at a wedding last year, I forget where, but it don't matter. The ceremony was over, breakfast eaten, the usual amount of crying and kis-ing got through, and the happy pair entered the carriage that was to take them the first stage to paradise. The friends of the bride collected at the door on the bridegroom's side to say good-bye, the friends of the bridegroom at the door on the other ; Good-bye, John, said the former, wish you every happiness, if there's *an angel on earth Mary's one*, good-bye. Mary, said the group at the other door, wish you a pleasant trip, take care of John, for if *there is a fool upon earth he's one*.'"

"Devilish good !" laughed Forbes, "I wonder how the happy couple got on."

"Yes," replied Lyttlereck, "but you don't take in the idea of being looked upon as 'John.' I wonder why men appear so contemptible at their own marriages ; women, as a sex, take it all out of us then. Now do you think Reardon saw I was an

engaged man when he told me that story? did he see 'Benedict the married man' written in my face? He couldn't have seen me 'brushing my hat o' the morning,' not being admitted to the mysteries of my toilette."

"Of course, I can't say positively, but it's highly improbable, how could he? Hang it, Tom, you're getting sensitive about what you ought to feel proud of."

"So I am," rejoined Tom, hastily; "but here's another curious coincidence. I met Gerald Massey a day or two back, you know Massey," Frank nodded, "well I generally stop and have a gossip with him, and hang it all he must tell a story of his sister's wedding. It seems his youngest brother was soldiering in India, and came home invalided round the Cape, they had written to tell him all about the engagement, but he just missed his letters. He was a deuce of a time on his way home, and on landing made the best of his way to the paternal nest; got there one morning between eleven and twelve, family butler opened the door.

"'All right, sir, so glad to see you, Mr. Richard; you're just in time.'

"'Why, what's the row; and what am I just in time for?'

"'Here, Mrs. Thompson, Mrs. Thompson; here's Mr. Richard come back just in time.'

"In bustled the housekeeper. 'Oh, la! I am so glad to see you, sir, and to think of your turning up just now, just in time; oh, my! but run along, sir, you're only just in time.'

"'Confound it, what on earth am I in time for?'

"Regular chorus of 'Oh, do run along, sir,' from the butler, housekeeper, maids, footmen, &c., 'You'll be just in time,' and it was with the greatest difficulty he at last extracted from them that Miss Edith and the bridal party had just left for church, and 'Oh, sir, you'll be just in time.'"

"Well," smiled Forbes, "you're talking in a most demoralizing manner. If I didn't know you pretty well, I should be tempted to think you were regretting your engagement."

"Don't be a fool ! you know I'm only too proud of having won Laura ; but it's a deuce of a business this 'getting married,' I shall be awfully glad when it's all over."

Cis Langton, had he been present, would probably have rejoined, "and awfully sorry ever afterwards ;" but there was no cynicism in Frank Forbes, so he did what was probably best under the circumstances, he held his tongue. An accomplishment, by the way, few of us ever exercise in the right place.

"You see," continued Tom, "I shall have to 'go in' for work now. We shall be dreadfully poor, I don't suppose Laura has much, and I've not a deal, that is to marry on. But she's a dear plucky girl, and says she don't mind roughing it a bit."

"She," chimed in Forbes, "not she, she's a devilish deal too good for you, Master Tom, and I half believe it's only yourself you are thinking of, you selfish old beast."

"No, I don't think I am," replied Tom, quietly, "but I know I am asking her to give up a good deal when she takes me."

You see, though Tom Lyttlereck has as good an opinion of himself as most men, he was getting very soft-hearted and humble at the idea of marrying an arrant little flirt. I suppose it is so with most of us ; more is the pity we don't continue the illusion a little longer. Frank Forbes ought, as a sensible young man of the age, to have declined to hear his old chum diverge into sentimentalism, instead of which he rejoined :

"And do you think any girl worth winning wouldn't be prepared to do that for the man she loved ? Don't talk nonsense !"

From which I am afraid it must be inferred, that the gentleman's nature was weakly sentimental, that he probably was not fancy free himself, and built airy visions of asking some *démouille* to share his name and chambers at some future period.

Do not believe that sentimentalism is confined to the softer sex : two men over their tobacco can talk as much sentiment as the most gushing young ladies. To some men in Lyttlereck's situation, a snug smoking-room, the grateful cutty, or fragrant cabana, and a friend to pour confidences into, is Elysium. One

confidante is nothing to such men, they make a dozen. Personally, I quite agree with Bon Gaultier,—

"Oh Lord it is the greatest bore
Of all the bores I know,
To have a friend who's lost his heart
A short time ago."

The pair smoked on in silence. Forbes' last sentiment would bear reflection, and each sat lazily watching the smoke wreaths.

"By Jove!" said Tom, at last; "to think of leaving the old rooms. Close on ten years I've been here, and now I am going to become a householder, pay rates and taxes, and all that sort of thing. How you'll miss your neighbour, eh? Tell you what, you'd better go in for hard work when I'm gone."

"Confound your impudence!" was the rejoinder. "Here he is," continued Forbes, addressing an imaginary audience; "just going to get married and 'live happy ever afterwards,' as the story books say, and he selects the hottest afternoon of the year to preach hard work to his friend, whom he leaves behind in this matter-of-fact world. Ugh, you heathen! I suppose you've been too much immersed in your own affairs to notice it, but our friend, Charlie Repton, carries on a most desperate flirtation with Mrs. Bartley."

"He does; yes, I've seen that. It would be a deuced deal better for them to avoid that sort of thing. You see, he was very *épris* with her before her marriage, in fact, at one time, I know, none of us would have been surprised to hear that Charlie and Belle Brabazon were engaged. I never could make out quite how that went off. I never saw Charlie pay any other woman half so much attention, and she certainly received it well enough. I should have thought him a great favourite of hers, to say the least of it. Then suddenly we hear she's going to be married to Bartley, and have hardly heard it before it's a fact. Do you recollect the way Charlie took the news of her marriage that night at Ryalston? It struck me it jarred upon him—he was inclined to be bitter the whole evening."

"Can't say I recollect noticing it ; but I don't think I ever saw Charlie take so much trouble to do the amiable before. Don't you recollect his flirtation with Mrs. Inglemere down in -
Barkshire ? There wasn't so much earnestness of purpose about that. It flowed on very tranquilly. A quiet, pleasant, dreamy sort of flirtation, almost pastoral in its placidity. Quite a Phillida and Corydon arrangement."

"Yes, that's the devil of it. These idle, indolent men, when they are once roused, are apt to be doggedly obstinate. Charlie will go drifting along with his eyes shut, blindly yielding to his passion, and finally, rather exult in defying public opinion. However, Mrs. Bartley is a clever woman, and though I fear her marriage was rather a mistake, and though this *affaire* undoubtedly is, yet I don't think she'll let either herself or Charlie make fools of themselves. I suppose they'll get talked about, and that's bad enough."

"Yes," said Forbes. "Of course you may play with fire, and not burn the house down ; but it shakes your credit at the insurance offices all the same."

"Well, you and I can't help it. I know Charlie pretty well, and it's a case you can speak to no man on to do good, let him alone. In his college days, if you wanted to harden him in iniquities, you had only to preach. Some horses, if they feel the curb, only pull the harder. Charlie's a little that way." A knock at the door interrupted Tom's reflections, and a boy entered with some letters, one of which Tom immediately pounced upon. It was not very long and ran as follows :—

"DEAR TOM,

"We pass-through town on Monday next, on our way to the Rendleshams at Folkestone. I have persuaded Minnie to stay one night on one condition, that is : you take us somewhere for the evening, as she says she won't be bored doing propriety without something to amuse her. I don't know that the arrangement then is very proper ; but there's no great harm

in it, so do as you are told, sir, get tickets for something amusing, and call for us at the old place in Dover Street, in time to escort us there,

"Your own,

"LAURA."

"P.S.—Don't be vain, perhaps I want to see you a little. Mind I have a pleasant evening. "L."

After perusing it twice or thrice, Tom thrust it in his pocket, and proceeded to leisurely skim the remainder.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "a note from Cis Langton, say they're good for another paper on the Eastern Question for next month, if I've not exhausted all my 'larning.' Listen to this, Frank.

"The fact is, the Eastern Question is beginning to take a strong hold on the public mind. We have dreamed over it for years, but people are beginning to have an inkling that the settlement is near at hand, and may be of considerable difficulty. One can hardly suppose it can lead to war in these days, but Russia is taking a very decided attitude thereon."

"Duce take it! I fear I sucked my brains dry on that subject last time. I think I'll run down to Fulham and see Langton."

"I should wait till it got a little cooler," chimed in Frank. "Run down in the evening."

Few people, I suppose, about August, eighteen hundred and fifty-three, would have recognised the possibility of our going to war. Was not the age too advanced for any appeal to the sword? Disagreement among nations was a mere matter of diplomacy. You make a demonstration there—we must move troops to threaten that—good, that becomes embarrassing. We shall move a squadron here which will give check to your castle. Yes, precisely; but if I transfer a *corps d'armée* there, I menace your frontier and produce an *émeute* among your pawns. Armies and fleets were mere pieces on the board, never destined to actually come in collision.

"England is a great nation," said Russia. "She is above all things a consistent nation. She cannot object to a little annexation on my part in Europe, having just annexed herself the territory of Oude in Asia. She wants a route to India, we will bribe her with another bit of annexation. The Sick Man verily is very sick. The death struggle is sometimes painful, it would be kind to assist nature."

At the beginning of this century, I believe, in remote country districts it was not thought wrong in domestic life to assist nature. In the Memoirs of Mr. Barham, we read of the old gentleman who was dying rather hard, and in the words of the nurse, "I just took the pillow from under his head, pinched his poor nose, and, poor dear, he went off like a lamb." What could be more truly charitable than to assist nature in her death throes. It can concern but us two. Austria may not like it, still she will have to bear it. So Russia argued it would be better she should just pinch the Ottoman nose, while England took the pillow from under his head.

But there were two things which Russia could hardly have reckoned upon. First that the Emperor of the French wanted an European war to consolidate his dynasty. Secondly, that marvellous spirit of fair play which characterizes the English nation. Egypt might be a desirable acquisition; but taking the pillow from under the Sick Man's head was so mean and cowardly, that the English nation's wrath rose at the idea. Indian affairs were not known much of in those days by the general public. The annexation of Oude was looked on as probably that of a small and troublesome district infested by robbers. But aggression by Russia in Europe was not to be heard of. She must not be allowed "to pinch the Sick Man's poor nose," and the "Anglo-French Preventive Aggressive Society" was the consequence.

The great struggle is long since over, nothing remains but a few ribbons, crosses, and "the bill." The French Emperor consolidated his dynasty, and gave *la grande nation* a strong dose

of the *gloire* they love so. As for the Sick Man, he seems at present more decrepid than ever, and signs point unmistakeably to the end of Ottoman rule in Europe.

For the next half hour Tom was supposed to be revolving the Eastern Question in his mind, though in reality, I fear, he was thinking more over Laura's note. Forbes was buried in a book. At last Tom rose, stretched himself, dived into his bedroom, and re-appearing with his hat, nodded a "good-bye" to Forbes, and plunged into the ever bustling Strand.

There's a fascination for me in the Strand, for the matter of that in any large bustling thoroughfare. I am apt as I moon along, and I plead guilty to being an inveterate street-lounger, to speculate on the vocations of the passers-by. I wonder, for instance, at the old gentleman looking so earnestly into the lamp shop, where he lives, whether he meditates on a new solar for his drawing-room, down Clapham way I should think. Is that pretty girl with him his daughter? But ah, there's another! what is she? That young lady so quietly dressed, becomingly too, though showing palpably in the somewhat worn bonnet that she finds this world's gear hard to come by. She carries a roll of music in her hand. Is she a music mistress, or is she a struggler at the theatres? I begin to conjure up visions of an Ada Latimer, when a collision with a strong-bodied young man, carrying a large basket, knocks me into the gutter, a *contre-temps* which his "now then stupid" does little to alleviate. No, the Strand is not meant for castle-building, so I walk on briskly, only to catch myself wondering at the end of the next twenty yards, what the deuce that red-nosed man with the big umbrella and rather worn gloves may be. Clerk confidential in an old city firm, comfortable savings, snug little house at Islington, perhaps. Here I find myself balancing opposite a black-bearded foreigner, who after we have simultaneously stepped two or three times, first to the curb-stone and then back again to the wall, gets by me at last with a flourish of his hat, and a "*Pardon, Monsieur.*"

Tom Lyttlereck, though at this time I'll admit he had every provocation to indulge in reverie, did not misconduct himself as I should have done, but made his way rapidly along Piccadilly, turned in at Hyde Park Corner, and began more leisurely to traverse the now deserted 'Row.'

Here he began meditating on how well Laura had looked on horseback that season, for that young lady had contrived to coax Charlie Repton out of several mounts. Mrs. Bartley had also been kind to her on that point, beside some few other friends, so that on the whole she had contrived to "manage a horse" most days during her three months in London. Then he thought whether he didn't like her best in her walking dress, and while deep in perplexity about this momentous question, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and Charlie Repton exclaimed :

"How are you, Tom, my hero? Are you wandering here in all the agony of a sonnet to her eyebrow?"

"Don't chaff, old fellow. She and Minnie pass through town on their way to Folkestone on Monday."

Of course this being uppermost in his own thoughts, he must needs at once blurt it out to Charlie.

"Oh Lord, it is the greatest bore,
Of all the bores I know," &c. .

Not that I pity Charlie in the least. Knowing the circumstances, he, to speak metaphorically, "stirred up the ants' nest;" people who do that must take the consequences.

"Pleasant," he returned, "for you and Laura, of course you'll be meeting them and seeing them off, and all that sort of thing; I scrawled a line to wish you joy, and conclude you got it. It took me rather aback. I never thought of your marrying, to tell the truth. Well, Tom, I'm not going to tell you Laura's an angel. She and I have had too many fights in our time for that; but she's a real good girl in spite of her being a little fast. She's no humbug, and says what she means. She wouldn't have 'gone in' for marrying you, unless she meant making you a good wife."

"Thank ye," said Tom, and strange as it may seem, no congratulation on his marriage had pleased him more than this. The reason is obvious. It was simply that, without complimentary language, it endorsed his own opinion, and Tom had a little lost his nerve and confidence in his own judgment since he had been desperately in love. His naturally shrewd head still at times made him reflect as to whether they two were quite calculated to begin life together on a moderate income? He rather trembled at the idea of Laura's finding the modest home he could offer her, a little flat, after the big houses she was wont to spend so much of her time in ; where she was so great an authority on theatricals, tableaux, and all those etcetera with which in such houses so much of the winter months is killed. He knew, none better, that many of the houses he or she frequented at present, would be closed to them as a married couple.

I was once staying with a friend of mine at a clergyman's house. The Rectory was close to the church, and we were lounging at the window to see a wedding party come out. The ladies of our party were loud in their encomiums of the bride, bridesmaids, &c. My friend looked on in silence for two or three minutes, and then in an absent sort of way murmured, "Poor fellow ! he little thinks he will always have two railway tickets to pay for in future."

"But now I come to think of it," said Tom, "what the deuce are you doing in town? I thought you were off to the Moors."

"So I ought to have been ; but that fool Ballantine, he's always making a mess of it, was so long seeing about a moor, that I hear now we've got a shocking bad one. It's a bad year with the grouse besides, and I almost doubt whether it's worth while going up ; but where are you bound for?"

"Making my way to Cis Langton's, he lives out in this direction. Have you seen Mrs. Bartley lately, or has she left town?"

"No, she's still in London. I saw her yesterday, in fact, dined there. I don't quite know what to do with myself, if I don't go to the Moors. Think I shall try the seaside for three weeks—only where to go, is the question."

"I should have a shy at the grouse, if I were you," replied Tom. "In the meantime, I must go across here, which I conclude is out of your line, so good-bye, old fellow," and the pair separated.

Tom mused a little over Charlie's not having left town, opined that Mrs. Bartley had probably something to say to it, wondered whether the sport on the Moors was as bad as Charlie described, and finally stepped out manfully in the direction of Fulham.

Arriving at Cis's modest residence, Tom rang the bell and inquired of the smart maid-servant who answered it, whether Mr. Langton was at home.

"No, sir," replied the girl; "but I don't think he'll be long first. Will you step up stairs, sir? Miss Breezie is in the drawing-room."

"Thanks, I think I will," and though his mind was full of another woman, Tom could not but admit that he had seldom seen a prettier picture than Breezie offered as he entered the half open door. She was sitting in the window bending over her easel. The dying rays of the afternoon sun played through the masses of her golden brown hair, and lit up her pretty face, as with slightly compressed brows she struggled with some difficulty in her work. Her neat muslin draperies were just warmed through the gilded panes, while the smallest of white hands balanced the brush in an undecided way. She did not hear Lyttlereck's approach till he was close to her, when she raised her head.

"Oh, Mr. Lyttlereck, I'm so glad to see you!" and she gave Tom her hand. "I don't like giving in, still, you see, this tree in the foreground has proved too much for me. I'm quite glad of an excuse to give it up for a while. What brings you here?"

to see papa, I'm afraid? Nevertheless, you must make shift with me for a while."

"Well, rude as it may be, I'm afraid that I must admit it was your father——"

"Of course it was," interrupted Breezie, "and under other circumstances, I should punish you for that admission. But as I like Laura extremely, am to be one of her bridesmaids, and you've no business to think of anyone else just now, I shall be merciful. Papa will be in very soon. In the meantime, you and I will have a real good gossip. How's Laura? and where is she?"

Here was an opening. I need scarcely say Tom availed himself of it, and was diffuse on the subject.

Fortunately, women don't think so. Anything connected with a marriage is sure to elicit sympathy, or at least, attention from them. Tom and Breezie accordingly got on very well, till the return of Cis Langton invited the discussion of dinner and the Eastern question.

One is told never to sing the praises of one woman to another—dangerous it is undoubtedly. But if there is a time when you may deviate from this rule, it is when you chant the praises of your bride elect. Why? Is it that her sister sees the imperfections of the angel—the spots on the sun, and so derives a malicious pleasure from our rhapsodies?

CHAPTER XIX.

DOWN AT FOLKESTONE.

THE sea! the first smell of the salt water, do we ever forget it? No; to those born and nourished within the roar of the surf, its memory never fades. Our path in life may throw us amongst

the gusty uplands, the smiling valleys, or the busy hum of great cities ; but the man, who as a child played on the edge of salt water, remembers it still. Years may elapse ere he sees it—earning his bread in some inland region, he still at times in his dreams hears the fierce thunder of the waves as they surge on the shingle-bound coast at flood tides. Again memory carries him back in milder mood—he hears the low lazy rippling of the ocean as it coquettishly kisses the shore ; he sees the broad shimmering pathway the moon casts over the waters, the white cliffs standing out like so many ghostly colossal sentinels ; the air seems charged with liquid laughter.

The picture changes. That chill ghastly moon, the grey mackerel sky, the light scudding clouds ; the breeze gambolling in its strength, as if first tossing a lady's curls ere it showed its power ; the long solemn boom of the surf ; the low dark cloud just above the horizon. He has seen it many times, so he can fancy the coming change. The sea, one great caldron of wrath, the huge waves now struggling furiously with each other ; now combining for one savage rush at the shore they had of late kissed so gently ; their white crests tossing as they fall back in broken confusion, like the wreck of an army of Paladins recoiling from an unsuccessful assault on some grim mediæval fortress. The sky lit up now and again with the quick sharp violet-tinted lightning, throwing its lurid light on the chalky cliffs. The sharp shrill whistle of the wind runs rapidly up the gamut, finally shrieking aloud in its anger.

Years may roll by. To him who was first nurtured by the sea there is ever a magnetic spell in the salt water. He is on his way thither—miles ere it is in sight he becomes conscious of the old feeling, the old flavour is in his nostrils ; he smelleth the brine ; his pulse quickens ; his nerves tingle ; an exhilaration of spirits is upon him. Jaded perchance in mind and body, he comes there for health, and already, ere his eyes can rest upon her, he feels the magnetic influence of the mighty ocean—his nurse.

Who, to whom it has chanced, though perhaps wearied with the voyage, will not recal with pleasure those glorious evenings in the tropics, when the sun met the ocean in a flood of crimson light, turning the light clouds into one blazing landscape of hill and headland. Memory brings back the soft murmuring ripple of the water under the ship's side; the well nigh dark hour that succeeded the sun's disappearance, ere the "Southern Cross" showed in all his majesty with the fleecy Magellan clouds and all the glittering jewellery of the southern hemisphere; while the caressing trade wind made the vessel dance merrily o'er the sparkling water. Verily, one's evening cigar was wrapped in rose leaves at such time.

I cannot recollect, though I think it is Montaigne, who has given us such a charming chapter on the fitness of reading certain books under certain circumstances. "The Ancient Mariner" is always charming; but will never be read to such advantage as "under the line." From Beachy Head, round Dungeness to the Foreland, what a mine of historical recollections that bold shingly coast conjures up. From the landing of the Romans, down to Sir John Moore drilling his troops at Shorncliffe for the disastrous campaign that terminated in the triumphant, though useless, flash of Corunna, that line of coast figures largely in the annals of English history. The charm of romance hangs round it. Think of the wild smuggling legends with which every mile is associated, when Folkestone was but a small fishing village, and the women thereof wives and daughters of fishers. But, alas for romance! the bold smugglers are gone, and their descendants levy their black mail on the traveller instead of the Government. Rapacious shop-keepers take the place of "Smuggler Bill," while "the bonnie fish-wives" let lodgings, keep milliners' shops, and dress up their daughters in silks and satins on Sundays.

It is with the Folkestone of the present we have to do. The Folkestone of the rapacious lodging-keeper, of tidal trains, of mail packets, of beach tents, of bathing machines, and that

boasts, last though not least, the Pavilion Hotel. Eclipsing rapidly its neighbour Dover, with its fast diminishing residents, its compulsory soldier element and autumnal flood of strange people. The tide of fashion, ever capricious, has ebbed from Dover to rise high at Folkestone. There is the camp with its bands; there is the daily agonizing spectacle contained in the mail-boat; there are cricket matches to look at; there's the ever bracing Lees to walk up and down on; and when, too, undue exhilaration of spirits has been produced by all these and the fresh evening sea breezes, is there not the pilgrimage to Hythe, most mildewed of villages, to bring one back to a sense of gravity? That ghastly-looking place, with its green, damp assembly-rooms, which require much faith in order to believe them the lively rooms tradition records they were in the days of the "Staff Corps," Martello Towers, and the formation of the Military Canal.

Mrs. Bartley, after considerable debate, had at length determined that Folkestone should have the benefit of her sojourn that autumn. Her husband had rather suggested Brighton, things were not looking altogether rosy in "the City." The money-making machine was troubled in his mind; but he was ever indulgent to the wishes of his young wife, and he could run down for Saturday and Sunday, or longer, should the god he worshipped allow. We all worship it more or less, for the matter of that, and if so many of us are not money-making machines, it is because we do not know how to set about the manufacture. What a pity the bulk of us are born with so little to spend, and so little power of accumulating. Take comfort, my poor spendthrift brethren, makers of large fortunes seldom enjoy them. It is given to certain of this generation to make, in order that the next may have some able to spend.

Mrs. Bartley had accordingly come down to Folkestone, and established herself in a very pleasant set of rooms at the Pavilion. When the wheels of your chariot are gilded, the road

runs easy, ruts are for those who travel in copper coaches. Seated at an open window, overlooking the Channel, Belle was musing over the last few weeks. The corrugated brow seemed to show that, in the vista her dreaming eyes looked down, the pictures were not all pleasant. She thought of many things—of what was, what might have been—wishing, as most men and women will till the end of time, that she could live over again the irrevocable past. Why had she let her pique hurry her into this fatal marriage? She blamed herself, woman-like, more than Charlie Repton. She was to blame deeply—those who sell themselves to gold ever are; but in this every-day world of ours it is daily done, and held but a venial sin. Well, I fancy it carries its own punishment heavily enough, without our troubling our heads to throw stones. Was Repton guiltless in this case? Had he not given her to expect both by word and look a different ending? Had not his pique, indolence, selfishness, or what you will, as much to do with it as she? What was she to do? Why had he sought her again? Why had she encouraged him to do so?

Of course she thought he might still be an old friend; as a matter of course she was just beginning to awake to the consciousness that he was becoming something very different. It is not worth while to indulge in any abuse of Platonic philosophy. It is very good when we get too old for any other, and when that epoch occurs I must leave for the wise to determine, merely advising a liberal margin.

Belle pondered over this; she thought, too, much of her husband. It's true, she acknowledged to herself that she cared . . . though they had little in common, he . . . he had ever humoured her every whim; she owed something to him; she would see Repton no more. It was not likely she should see him again that year, and next season she would go abroad, or with a little tact might even avoid seeing much of him in London. Indignant tears rose to Belle's eyes as she made this praiseworthy resolution that she

should still care for a man who had treated her so badly ; and yet had he done so, was it not her fault ? was not she to blame ? why had she no patience ? She alone could tell what a bitter, sharp-tongued old woman had to say to it all. Yes, those bitter old women make many matches—I don't know whether in Heaven, where they are all registered, we're told ; but they do in this world.

Belle dried her eyes ; it was of course wrong of her ever to have wet them, but then we are not always masters of ourselves upon these occasions. She had made up her mind, she had argued cleverly round the circle, felt what all women dearly love—that she was making a sacrifice ; she would be firm—what a fool she had been. A knock at the door cut short her reflections, and the waiter announced Mr. Repton.

“How do you do ? I heard you were here when I arrived last night.”

“Heard I was here—why this affectation ? You knew I was here. Why are you not at the Moors ?” she spoke with bitterness.

Charlie saw intuitively that something was wrong. Belle was not difficult to read, and he had the book by heart.

“We've got such a shocking bad Moor, and the accounts of the sport are so poor, that I finally determined to come to the sea for a fortnight ; knowing that you and the Clippington girls were down here, I thought I should find this pleasant.”

The Clippington girls was a lucky suggestion. Belle was not aware of their being in the neighbourhood. Of course, she thought, if the sport is so bad on the Moors, and he wanted to come to the sea-side, it was natural he should select the watering place at which his favourite cousins were staying. It was a narcotic to her conscience.

Recovering herself at once, she replied—

“No—are they ? I'm so glad. I didn't know they were here. I haven't seen them. Where are they staying ?”

“At the Rendleshams', just off the Lees ; but they only came

down two days ago. I thought you would all make such a cheery party, and be very jolly down here ; so, the Moors having failed, it struck me I couldn't do better than join you for a fortnight. Lyttlereck, too, I should think, will run down for a few days."

"Charming ! of course. We can organize no end of pleasant parties. I don't know what there is to see about here, as I was never at Folkestone before ; but there must be lots of things. Do you know the place ?—if not, you must read up the local guide-book and find out everything for us."

"Plenty to see, plenty to do—there always is if you have only pleasant people," remarked Charlie. "The bog of Allen, or the fens of Lincolnshire, do well enough to look at, if you've only nice people to see them with. I have thought a wretched old ruin in the ugliest county in England charming, while I recollect being most unfavourably impressed with the valley of the Wye. It's all a matter of association. If you think candidly over what you've seen best worth looking at in nature, you'll find that they were not the views which enchanted you most at the time, or that you treasure in your memory as the sunny days of existence."

"You think, I presume, then, that people make places ?—that we like or dislike localities according to those we meet there ?"

"In great measure, people and circumstances guide us. I hear a man rave of the attractions of some out-of-the-way place, a place always pre-supposed to be singularly destitute of any. I cross-examine him, analyse his feelings ; I come to it at last, he met such a pretty girl staying down there. I see it all now, he was frightfully spoony ; she, whoever she was, threw a roseate tinge over the whole place. Whatever may come of that flirtation, he associates that place in his mind always with glorious sunsets, &c., &c., though probably his lodgings were uncomfortable, the town contemptible, the surrounding country detestable, and an east wind prevalent

nine months out of the year. When a man begins boring me with the delights of any place, I always ask, 'who did you know there?' and if in the next five minutes you haven't discovered a feminine object of interest, put no faith in my philosophy."

"And what about the ladies?" inquired Mrs. Bartley, laughing.

"That's another thing, I think I must leave them to you. I suppose, though, they talk to each other much as we do; they don't confide their loves to us, you see, and are not such blundering boobies as we are to betray their hands unwittingly. When they talk love to us, it's generally interesting and personal on both sides; I never knew but one who confided in me otherwise."

"Let me hear about that, you would make such a charming *confidante*. What did you advise? What was the case?"

"Very common-place, even she didn't believe her sex; she didn't take me into her confidence till the affair was all over, and she knew I had heard it all from the other side. I knew one other case of a lady taking a gentleman into her confidence under those circumstances; but it ended in her marrying the *confidante* instead of the original lover—so perhaps they're right, it's safer not."

Belle had now thoroughly recovered herself, and when Charlie took his leave was as cordial as usual; and all the conscientious resolutions of the morning had vanished. She thought only now of what a pleasant fortnight they might have; it was absurd, she had been low-spirited—what nonsense! Of course she and Charlie would be very good friends; she had control over herself, and if he was foolish enough to make the mistake of overstepping proper limits, why, then it would be time enough to set him right. It is of course much more courageous to trust to your strength of mind than ignobly to fly temptation. For my part, I am a weak mortal, and would sooner trust to my heels than my resolutions any day.

Charlie Repton's mind, as he lounged up to the Lees, was a

chaos. What he meant, what he wanted, he could hardly have told, had he been so minded. Oftentimes he chafed furiously that Belle was lost to him ; then again, when his better angel got the better of him, he swore to break off the intimacy, he would go abroad, travel, anything. He owned to himself that he loved Belle passionately, and would fiercely have resented the idea that his love could bring but shame and sorrow to her. Like many other men, Repton preferred putting aside a difficulty to looking it straight in the face. A glance at Belle's deep grey eyes and handsome face would scatter his good resolutions at any time. How would it all end ? well, time would show ; in the meanwhile,

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may."

He was neither a foolish man, nor altogether an unprincipled one ; he saw clearly the madness of his present proceedings, but lacked energy to fly temptation. He cursed the indecision that had separated them ; but never accepted the situation, to wit, that they were irrevocably separated ; so he drifted on with all the persistent obstinacy of an indolent man, thoroughly roused by a *grande passion*.

Neither he nor Belle had guessed that already bitter tongues were busy with their names. The accused are generally the last to hear of their sins on such occasions. Society sheds many unnecessary tears over offenders, who are still unconscious of the crime on which they have been arraigned and found guilty. Society often not only precipitates, but incubates the very offence which so shocks it. Men run away with their neighbours' wives because society has deemed them about to do so ; still there is not much commiseration due to the victims. If you eat of the apples of the Dead Sea, you cannot complain if their flavour is not that of honest Ripston pip-pins. If you make love to women you ought not, don't expect sympathy if sorrow comes of it ; it's a censorious world,

"Oh, yes it is," laughed Minnie. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you know very well."

Leaning over the balustrade of the upper terrace are a couple in earnest conversation.

"Well, Miss Langton," said Jack Travers—for they were the pair—"this will be our last meeting for ever so long."

"No! I'm so sorry. Why? Must you go back to your regiment?"

"Yes; I had an extension of two days on purpose to be here to-day, but I start to-morrow."

"Oh! dear, and Belle talks of going to the sea in about three weeks. I shall lose all my friends, and I have so few that are really friends."

"And may I hope that I am one of that limited list!" inquired Jack.

"Of course you are. Didn't I appoint you my knight, and order you to wear my colours at our very first meeting? Don't I look upon you as my champion now, upon all occasions, a very *preux chevalier*, ready to die for me if necessary?"

"Well, but you never gave me your colours."

"No," interrupted Breezie, laughing; "I'm afraid it isn't the fashion in these degenerate days—any more than it is for men to die for us—and after all, I don't see much use in their doing that if we care anything about them. Do you? It's always the nice people who get killed, or into difficulties, and have to go away; which is the same sort of thing."

Miss Langton, in her somewhat Bohemian life, had seen a good deal of the latter interruption to friendship, which may account for her wandering and desultory speech.

"Well, I hope—it's selfish, but we all hope the same, when we say good-bye to people we like—I hope you'll miss me."

"Indeed I shall. You've been very kind to me—to say nothing of the dangers which you ran once in my behalf," and Breezie gave an arch smile, as she thought of the scene at King's Cross.

sighted cousin was very difficult to blind. He was quite aware that often as Laura had rallied him about Mrs. Inglemere and similar *tendresses*, she had never alluded to his flirtation with Belle. He didn't suppose for one moment that it had escaped her. Now, what had brought him to Folkestone was, he felt, difficult to account for to anyone with Laura's penetration and knowledge of the antecedents.

He paused for a moment ere he replied, "That the sport on the Moors was so indifferent, his letters told him, that he had decided on not going there this year ; that, in consequence, he determined on running down for two or three weeks to the sea instead."

"And so," replied Laura, "for the benefit of our society and Mrs. Rendlesham's luncheons, you have come to Folkestone. Charlie, I don't believe you. Never mind, sir, when I find out the real cause, tremble for this want of confidence."

"Well, in the meantime, what are you going to do with yourselves this afternoon? Don't you mean having a walk somewhere?"

"Yes, of course. Come along, Minnie, and let's get our bonnets on."

A few turns of the Lees, and it became evident a band was playing in one of the adjacent squares, and thereto the party resorted. Some green-coated, flat-capped Germans were discoursing very pretty music through their dingy-looking brass instruments. The garden was thronged ; chairs at a premium ; and Charlie had some little difficulty before he found seats for his party. They had not long established themselves, ere Laura's eye caught the approach of a graceful figure, robed in a sweeping dark silk.

"Who's this?" she exclaimed ; but as she spoke, Charlie Repton sprang to his feet, and advanced quickly to meet the lady in question, to whom he lifted his hat ; and in a few seconds, Mrs. Bartley had shaken hands with the party, and was in possession of Charlie's vacated chair.

A glance of intelligence crossed Laura's face. She saw now too clearly what had brought Charlie to Folkestone. For a minute the blue eyes were troubled, and then she had made up her mind as to her rôle on the occasion. There was, of course, nothing to be said; she was very fond of Charlie, and liked Mrs. Bartley much also. Clearly, the best thing they could do, was to be very friendly, and see a good deal of her while there. She thought them both foolish; but it would be best if they joined parties everywhere; would at all events prevent scandal, and give them time to come to their senses. So nothing could be more cordial than Laura's manner, when, after strolling about for the whole afternoon together, they eventually separated preparatory to dinner, having entered into engagements for the next day, while Charlie quietly escorted Mrs. Bartley back to the hotel.

Friday brought down Mr. Bartley, by no means in the best of humours. Things looked black in the City, consequently he took a jaundiced view of the accommodation of the hotel. Pooh poohed the soup; anathematized the sherry; abused the waiters; and finally relieved his mind by 'blowing up' the landlord. Wondered what his wife could see in Folkestone? Enlarged a good deal upon the superiority of Brighton; and after having been bilious and abusive for eight-and-forty hours, once more betook himself to his money-making. To his pretty wife, as ever, he was kind; but I should think the myrmidons of the hotel put him down as a gentleman 'difficult to please.'

The sunny August days slipped pleasantly away. They, that is, the Clippingtons, Mrs. Bartley, Charlie, and Tom Lyttricek, who had now joined the party on the plea of his health requiring change, went over to Canterbury and Dover, made excursions to Shakespeare's Cliff, saw the mysterious Golgotha near Hythe, lounged on the Lees, &c., in short, revelled in all the pleasant idleness of the sea-side. Charlie was still in pertinacious attendance on Mrs. Bartley; but Tom and Laura, lost in their own sweet communing, paid but little attention

thereto. Alas, that such rosy hours should be so few ! I verily believe some people miss getting married, from fear of curtailing those delicious hours of love-making. We must confess marriage turns the poem into prose, and to reflective minds domestic bliss suggests baggage, babies, and a difficulty about free wandering from henceforth.

It's a glorious night towards the end of August, and after much promenading of the Lees, the party has rather scattered, though at nine or thereabouts, Mrs. Rendlesham, excellent woman, has solemnly adjured them to be in to tea.

Charlie and Belle are wandering slowly along the edge of the cliff. They pause and look down over the glittering water, which the big red harvest moon bathes in silver.

"Do you recollect," whispers Charlie, "standing on the pier at Brighton, just such a night as this, last year, with the band playing in the distance ?"

A dangerous reminiscence ; they both recollected that evening, one of those sunny spots in their flirtation, although the moon shone down upon it. Belle was then still Miss Brabazon. The scene came back to them. A stanza of that fine ballad of Lord Dorset's describes the feeling.

"When any mournful tune you hear,
That dies in every note,
As if it sighed with each man's love
For being so remote,
Think then how often love we've made
To you when all those tunes were played."

And as the notes of the ever-playing watering-place band died away, Belle's face softened. Yes, it was the same air ; but how different were things with them now. She thought of what she had then dreamt—how a wall had risen up between them so soon afterwards. What had been the consequence thereof ?

Neither spoke for some minutes ; but there are times when silence is eloquence. Pauses which say more than lips could

ever utter. When muteness does more for us than rhapsody. Bear this in mind, ye talkers, and be careful how you hurry the *audante*.

Charlie was the first to break silence.

"It seems long ago," he said; "but it's one of those memories that will last my life time. Whilst I live I shall never forget that evening."

"Nor I," murmured Belle, half unconsciously to herself.

"What different thoughts and hopes I had then. This scene is like, but it wants the glamour, enchantment—what you will, of those days."

"Yes, perhaps," said Belle, dreamily. "I suppose we were younger then; but it's getting chilly, we had better go into Mrs. Rendlesham's and see about some tea."

"That evening, I dare say, is not so deeply engraved on your memory as mine," said Charlie, rather piqued.

"Perhaps not," she replied, (as if she would ever forget it) "*oublier c'est le grand secret des natures fortes*, is it not? I pique myself on my strength of mind. Don't look angry, I've a great deal to try and forget."

The last words came almost plaintively from her lips, as they walked back to Mrs. Rendlesham's.

CHAPTER XX.

AN OLD STORY.

LONDON is stepping out briskly. It is one of those raw winter mornings, with just a crackle of frost in the air, pedestrians carry their somewhat blue noses high, looking capable, as they step along, of indefinite miles in the hour, if called upon. The "bus" outsiders look as if they had made a mistake, and suddenly become conscious, that running from Paddington Green or Islington to the City was a far preferable and more manly thing to do. Athletes begin to have that over-weening con-

sciousness, so inseparable from the approach of frost, skaters according to their various capacities are contemplating abstruse figures, the outside edge or innumerable falls. Cab-drivers look at their horses' legs, as if that could be an encouraging spectacle, and muse over the necessity of getting their shoes "cocked." Schoolboys are wrapped up in glorious visions of plum-pudding, beneficent uncles, pantomimes, and exaggerated tips. Pretty girls are thinking of pleasant Christmas parties in country houses, blushing slightly at the thought of miseltoe and some favoured cousin; favoured cousins, on the contrary, are meditating more upon their chance of weathering the yearly financial crisis than on miseltoe. Tailors are wondering gloomily as to who is likely to really meet "the compliments of the season," and as to where the screw may be applied with advantage.

In short, Christmas is approaching with signs of a frost.

Cis Langton sat moodily before his fire at the little house at Fulham; the breakfast was just cleared away, and Breezie was flitting about the room, now tending some rather consumptive-looking plants, now running over a few bars on the piano, and then making some slight arrangements at her easel.

Cis's face showed that he was thinking deeply, and apparently by no means pleasantly. He was rapidly coming to the conclusion that he was beholden to make a most unpleasant revelation. One that would not only hurt Breezie, whom he doted on, sorely, but must tear open wounds of his own but yet half healed. He must tell the story of the most painful days of his life. Recall all that had so near maddened him at the time. Touch upon a past, that he would fain never have referred to again.

Jack Travers, though exiled to the pleasant town of Milton, had found numberless occasions which required his presence in London. His applications for temporary leave of absence had in fact been so numerous, that at last even "the best leave-granting colonel" in the service had been compelled to cry "hold, enough;" and to request the Adjutant to delicately hint

to Mr. Travers, that much as he should regret to have to refuse him, the country and the regiment must really have something ; in requital of the hundred and odd pounds a year it presented him with. That other subalterns had "urgent private affairs," with regard to balls, shooting, hunting, &c., in their turn, and that it was consequently incumbent on Mr. Travers, for the present, to manifest an interest in the length of his company's hair, and the *bonilli* of the regiment. Departing from his previous view, that his colonel was the best fellow in the world, Jack now, after the manner of mankind, deplored that fate had destined him to serve under such a cantankerous old curmudgeon. The colonel was about forty-six, a good officer, and as nice a fellow as need be ; but who expects justice or clear-sightedness from a man whose heart is riddled ?

After the manner of his kind, Jack increased his consumption of claret and tobacco, cursed the service, and spoke most irreverently of his seniors. "They all" do it, when required to perform mere garrison routine which interferes with pet projects. On active service their views have more breadth, and their repinings are considerably less. I have seen the saltiest of junk eaten with the cheeriest smile in the Crimea, by a man who'd—d the waiters in England, because the water in the finger-glasses had not had the chill taken off. Who shall blame them ? Let us sleep on roses while we may. Those so addicted to the rose leaf are none the worse Sybarites, when it comes to the muddy trench for a resting-place. I have seen white handed effeminate-looking striplings wear down the strongest of their men under those circumstances. 'Blood will tell,' is a maxim as old as the hills ; I can only say, back it when it comes to a pinch.

Now in all these trips to town, it may be easily conceived that Jack Travers had found endless occasions for calling at Fulham. Cis rather liked the good-hearted youngster ; Breezie, I'm afraid, had gradually learnt to do something more ; she had thought over that scene at Richmond a good deal since.

She had been conscious then that Jack was asking her to do something rather more than "like," and now, after seeing a good deal more of him, and moved by his unmistakable devotion to her, she had arrived at the conclusion that she cared a good deal about him. I don't mean to say that he had ever actually told her he loved her ; but words are not much required to explain such matters, she knew that she loved Jack, though he still only thought she loved him.

Had Breezie been a woman of the world, nothing could have been more reprehensible. It could scarcely be looked upon as an allowable marriage. Breezie's prospects were nothing—Jack's would have been described by his friends as about similar. Yet I've seen your worldly young women make as great mistakes ; but then they are more amenable to reason, as a rule more deficient in pluck to struggle against the ogre of their bringing up ; so they shed their tears, send back the ring and letters, marry the banker (or his account), and we'll hope as the story books say, "live happy ever afterwards."

But then you see, Breezie was not a woman of the world. She knew Jack Travers loved her, she knew now that she loved him : she felt quite certain that some of these days, not very far off either, he would ask her to marry him. She didn't suppose they would be rich, and that's about as much as she had thought on the subject of "ways and means," she had never known what it was to be rich. In Cis Langton's ever-changing, ever-struggling home, Breezie was quite accustomed to pecuniary short-comings. As Mr. Weller would express it, she knew what it was "to eat her beef without horse-radish," and had cared very little about it ; still Cis, in great measure, carefully masked his innumerable difficulties from her, she had little idea how often rent and butchers' bills had been a momentous question.

One only idea had troubled her on the point. How was she to leave the father she so adored ? What would he do without his little Breezie ? Who was to make his tea ? Who to cheer

and forgives and forgets very little, unless the culprit is heavily gilded.

Charlie strolled on till he came to the Rendleshams'; the sunshine, the breeze, and the tumbling waters improved his spirits, as they will anyone's (if you doubt, try Folkestone for a week); then he thought he would look up his cousins. It was near lunch time, too, and a man must eat, especially at the seaside.

"Good gracious, Charlie!" exclaimed Laura, "why, what on earth brings you here?"

"Why, you see," said Charlie, mendaciously, "I wanted to see Lyttlereck, and knowing you were here, thought it a likely place to find him."

Laura was not the young lady to be discomposed by an attack of this kind. She only laughed, as she answered--

"Well, never mind what brought you. I'm awfully glad you've come. Where are you staying; at 'the Pavilion?' Come down, do, and have some lunch. I'm perfectly ravenous. Mrs. Rendlesham, we had better feed him at once, before the sea air has time to tell. Then you can say you *have* entertained him, and warn him off the premises."

"Mr. Repton knows better, Laura," laughed Mrs. Rendlesham, a hale, cheerful lady, getting on towards the fifties. She and Charlie were old acquaintances. "Always a place for you, either at luncheon or dinner, and only hope you will often take advantage of it."

"But why are you not shooting? Couldn't you hit anything? Have you shot a dog or killed a keeper? Which are you flying from, doggicide or homicide? or are you merely convicted of incompetence? Now, don't tell any stories about it, I am prepared for the worst," and Laura threw herself back in her chair, and assumed an expression of patient suffering.

Charlie laughed. Yet this was just the one question he felt rather awkward to answer--'why he was not on the 'Moors?' He knew Laura's woman's wit rather too well--that quick-

fair-haired, blue-eyed, timid little girl was Lucy Rawson, when I first met her. I think it was her very weakness that first drew me to her. I was in the heyday of youth, full of fun, spirits; now riding hard with the drag, now drinking hard with the fastest set in my college, boxing, tandem-driving, &c., and this shrinking fragile flower possessed irresistible attractions for me. I wooed her and won her, and it was settled that we should be married when I was called to the Bar; for, as you know, I originally elected that for my profession. In those days, I had a moderate independence, too, of my own. Lucy was an only child, and it was only fair to suppose that her father, who held a comfortable living, would also do a little for us. I had youth, confidence in my powers, liked my profession; so, that upon the whole, if not rich, at all events we had every prospect of a moderate income. I worked hard, aye, and with a will, in those days, Breezie; now and then recompensing myself with a run down for a few days to see her whom I loved better than my life. Our engagement had lasted some two years, when a change came over Lucy. She wrote less frequently; her letters were shorter, in fact, they were no longer the dear loving letters of days of yore.

"I went down and saw her; she seemed glad to see me, but there was a constraint about her behaviour to me which had never existed before. She said she had been unwell, was nervous, and so on. Still, I returned to London, believing that that was merely the state of the case. Her letters grew shorter and fewer, and at last, in reply to a passionate letter of mine, she replied that our engagement had better terminate. 'She knew she could never make me happy,' &c. I went down instantly to Tenby, saw her; we had a scene—she cried a good deal, while I, God help me, entreated—however, I returned to town still affianced to her.

"Soon after that visit, I was 'called to the Bar.' I had a good deal to do, and wanted to get through it quickly. I worked hard, and, in consequence, it so happened I saw no

papers that week, nor many of my acquaintance ; certainly, I think none of my intimates. Well, I was free at last, I tumbled my things into a portmanteau, and started for Tenby. Your grandfather received me not only coldly and with an air of surprise, but almost angrily ; in fact, said ' He was surprised at my intrusion.' Guess my astonishment. I asked for an explanation. He was a man of easy-going temperament, and never had I seen him so agitated before.

" ' Stop, Mr. Langton ! ' he replied. ' I can hardly think that you come here to insult me ; but common sense, if not decency, might have spared me this interview. Do you think, sir, it can be agreeable to me to discuss with any man, much less a man of your years, the miserable follies—ah, crimes, is the truer word—of my early days ? God knows they have brought their own punishment.' "

" Great heavens ! Breezie," said Cis, rising and pacing the room ; " I can see it all now, as if it were but yesterday. The dark old library I knew so well—that agitated old man—my mystified, miserable self." His voice broke a little as he finished the sentence. For a minute or two he seemed wrapped in old reveries, while Breezie watched him with tears gathering in the large brown eyes for she knew not what.

" Well," he continued, at length, resuming his seat, and fondling the rich silky tresses with his hand ; " I stammered out my utter ignorance of everything with a faltering voice. My heart sank within me ; I felt the death-blow to my hopes was impending.

" ' You pretend,' he replied, ' not to know what has now been trumpeted from one end of the kingdom to the other. Have you no eyes, sir ? Have you no ears ? Do you mock me ? Are you wilfully deaf or blind ? Do you never see a paper ? ' "

" I told him I knew nothing of what he alluded to. That I hadn't seen a paper for a week.

" His voice softened. ' God bless you, Langton ! ' he said, ' I believe you. I do you so much right, that I think you would

not have been here to reproach me by your presence, had you known—— Leave me now. The papers will acquaint you with the miserable story of my life. It is not likely we shall meet again, as I leave England almost immediately. Good-night, and good-bye. Forget that you ever knew us as soon as possible.'

"'But Lucy! where is Lucy? may I not see her?'

"His voice instantly became hard and stern again. 'Lucy has gone to her aunt. It's extremely inadvisable that you should see her at present, if ever again; in which latter verdict you will probably concur when you know all. "The sins of the fathers are visited on their children,"' he murmured, as if to himself. 'Good-night, sir.'

"With a heavy heart, Breezie, I left that gloomy library. Light and hope seemed quenched together. Of course the papers were the first thing I sought; there I soon saw the melancholy history your grandfather had referred to. His wife was still living—a fact of which I had not the faintest idea. Yes, Breezie, your grandmother was at that time the inmate of a mad-house, and, it seems, had never been married to your grandfather——"

A burst of tears from the girl here stopped the narrator.

"Don't cry, darling," said Cis, "I can't go on if you do. You ought to know all this wretched story. I don't think I could shed a tear about it now, but time was when they trickled like molten lead from my eye-lids whenever I thought of it."

"Oh, papa!" sobbed the girl, "what agony you must have gone through. Why tell it me?"

"You must know it, child, the why you will see yourself shortly. I won't dwell on that trial. It was brought for the release of your grandmother as a sane woman, which it seems she had become, though I have no doubt her brain was seriously affected when she was first placed there. She was a person of much lower station in life than your grandfather, and apparently possessed of a most violent temper. Their life, while

together, I fancy had been intensely miserable, till the vehemence of her passions, conjoined with the use of opium, impaired her reason, which care and judicious treatment had now restored.

"Still, what was all this to me? I only felt that I loved Lucy all the more dearly, while there existed the far greater necessity for my offering her an immediate home. Where was she? I wrote a respectful note to her father, to say all this sad affair made no difference in my feelings, and asking for her address. I got no answer. I called at the Rectory. Mr. Rawson had left, and the servants knew nothing of his address or whereabouts, nor could I ascertain where this aunt lived with whom Lucy was supposed to be staying.

"God only knows what I suffered at that time. I was unremitting in my search after my lost one. I advertised; I employed police agents; I followed clues and prosecuted inquiries in every direction. One only thing could I ascertain, that Mr. Rawson was abroad, travelling in Germany, and that his daughter was not with him.

"Now, Breezie, my child," and Cis laid a solemn stress on the last two words, "you must nerve yourself for a very painful disclosure." He drew her close to him and kissed her. The girl's tearful eyes and earnest face showed how much she was enchained by the story, while a slight shudder ran through her frame at his words; but she nestled closer to him, lifting the tear-stained face and solemn eyes to his.

"Months elapsed before I obtained a clue to your mother's retreat, and what a clue it was when found! I discovered her at last——" here his voice shivered (I can use no other name for it), "in a quiet country-house near London; but it was a *maison de santé*! and she was under surveillance. I saw her, but she knew me not. She was very docile and gentle, and to my mixed horror and astonishment, wore a wedding-ring on her finger."

A passionate burst of sobbing from Breezie here interrupted his narration ; he soothed her as well as he could.

"It's hard, but you must hear it all. From the people there, I learnt that she had always been tractable and docile from the first. She was very quiet, and would sit for hours watching the approach to the house, ever expecting some one, and constantly enquiring if her husband had not arrived. At times she would ask passionately for you, then relapse into tears almost hysterical. Occasionally she would mention my name, reproaching herself bitterly with the wrong she had done me, this again followed by torrents of tears.

"She had been brought thither, accompanied by you, then an infant in arms, by an elderly gentleman, they told me ; and from the description, I had no difficulty in recognising your grandfather, who had also placed you out to nurse in a neighbouring farm-house. I went to see you, and infant as you were, you seemed to take to me from the first. As for your poor mother, I saw her constantly, my presence seemed to soothe her always ; but she never apparently recognised me till the day of her death. The seeds of consumption, which perchance were lying latent in her constitution, had been forced with unnatural rapidity by her disease, and a few months afterwards, she breathed her last in my arms. Two or three hours before her death, she looked at me earnestly for some minutes, and then murmured 'poor Cis !'

"Well, a few years after your poor mother's death, your grandfather also died. I was living a reckless life, then, Breezie. It seemed as if I had nothing left to live for, still I often found a day to run down and take a look at you. While your grandfather lived, he provided for you punctually ; but when he died, which he did rather suddenly, he left no will, and what property he had fell to distant relatives. I tried in vain to establish some claim upon them on your behalf, but was powerless. They wouldn't recognize you, and I hadn't the faintest clue to your mother's marriage. In fact, except

the ring on her finger, there was none. Whom your mother married—for I feel sure, Breezie, darling, she did marry,—I to this moment, spite of every inquiry I could institute, have no idea. So, child, I took charge of you and brought you up as mine own. Firstly, in memory of your dear mother; lastly, for your sweet self.

"Stop—don't interrupt me," he said, to the sobbing girl, who was endeavouring with choked voice to speak. "I shall have done now in one minute. You have been to me more a daughter than most fathers are blest with. In all the wild moments that followed that awful crash in my life, you were the good angel that saved me from utter destruction—aye, perhaps suicide. The necessity of taking care of my little Breezie, once more brought into play and a healthy state, an intellect well nigh unhinged by gambling, debauchery, and despair. Bohemian as my life has since been, it had an object in it—I have had a daughter to provide for, and well, my darling, have I been repaid. I owe you a debt instead of you owing me one, and if of late years I have had an uneasy thought connected with you, it has been the dread that that unknown father might reclaim you."

Slowly she disengaged herself from his embrace, and stood facing him as he sat. "And I have no right then to call you father; but I still may, may I not? yes, I know I may, I see it in your face. If I thought otherwise I should die. Oh!" and she threw herself at his feet, "how good you have been to me, to my poor mother, too, after all she made you suffer."

"Daughter of mine you will ever be, till death do us part," said Cis, caressing her; "but, child, you know I cannot have told you this sad story for nothing. Can you see why?"

"I think so," she replied, laying her head upon his shoulder. "Tell me, from that day to this, you have never had an idea who was my father?"

"No, I have not the slightest clue or suspicion."

"And you think—you *do* think, though you don't know, that my mother was married?"

"I believe and trust so; but with the exception that she wore a wedding ring, I know nothing. It is all conjecture; what chance there was of unravelling the mystery died with your grandfather. Fool that I was, not to seek him out while he lived; but an interview must have been so inexpressibly painful to both, that I shrank from it at the time. Of course, too, his death was a thing not to be looked for till some years had elapsed, and forgive me, Breezie, if in those days I did not recognize of how vital an importance the information might some time become to you."

"Papa, dear," she said, throwing her arms round his neck. "You did all you could; you took care of poor mamma, and have done the same for me all my life. Wherever or whatever my real father may be, in my eyes you will always be papa, as long as you can bear with me as a daughter—ah! even if you refuse to, which I know you never will."

"Never, darling, while I live!" replied Cis. "Now, answer me one question, do you like Travers?"

Breezie coloured deeply, and hid her face in his breast, as she whispered, "Yes."

"And has he ever told you that he liked you? Pshaw, what am I talking about; has he ever told you he loved you? Has he ever asked you to marry him?"

"No, papa," she murmured, "he never asked me to marry him. Let me go now, I want to go away to my room, and think it all over—my head aches; I know it's foolish," said Breezie, smiling faintly; "but I feel I must have a good cry over it all, and think it out in my own way. I'll tell you all when I'm able."

She kissed him, and left the room.

Long Cis sat pondering over the fire. Had he done right? Yes, he thought so. It was better by far she should know all now, than to have the hideous story cropping up after she was

married, or for all he could tell, after she was engaged. She was not the girl he thought her, if she left her lover in ignorance of her position. Maybe she would refer Travers to him; well, it was painful, but if he came as Breezie's accepted lover, he would put him in possession of as much of the story as it concerned him to know. In the meantime there was "copy" wanted, and Cis sat down moodily to his desk.

And what happened to Breezie? The first thing the girl did on entering her room, was to lock the door; then, pushing back the masses of shining brown hair, she stood staring at herself in the glass.

"Am I," she murmured to herself, "destined also to go mad? Shall I no longer know who comes near me? Shall my love of painting, poetry, flowers, and books all merge into one vast oblivion? Shall I be conscious too of nothing but the mere animal feelings of warmth, sunshine, and so on? Shall I sit, looking mechanically down a shadowy avenue for him who never comes? Is all this world that looked so bright an hour ago, to become a mere chaos? Shall I not even know my father? Nay, he's not my father. Shall I not even know him?" Here she burst into tears, and threw herself on the bed in a paroxysm of weeping.

Now, Breezie was not one of those young ladies who, under the plea of being all soul, decline to exercise the slightest control over their feelings. If her last mental soliloquy savour a little of bombast, remember how her nerves and feelings had been tried during the above-mentioned narrative. Few of us, I think, can contemplate the idea of loss of intellect without a shudder, even when no thought of such a calamity actually happening to ourselves, presents itself. The heritage of insanity strikes terror in its heirs. Judge then the horror with which this girl, a girl too, mind, of strong affections and vivid imagination, grappled with the fact that both her mother and grandmother had been inmates of an asylum. It was enough

to shake the strongest mind of man, much more the delicate organisation of a young girl.

Long she lay struggling with her emotions, then rose and paced the apartment. Could it be that her mind was one day destined to become a blank? No; surely the merciful Creator had not bestowed such a love of all that was bright and beautiful on her, only to take it away again, and leave her to a terrible living death. She fell on her knees, for spite of her Bohemian bringing up, poor Breezie had a religion, perhaps more instinctive than accurate in the broad truths of Christianity, but which, for all that, had more of the pure spirit thereof than is contained in the creed of many unctuous saints, who, with Scripture ever on their lips, manifest in their lives but little of the practical part of that religion they profess so loudly.

She rose comforted, and then again her great sorrow fell upon her. She was but mundane after all. May be it was very wrong of her so soon to turn again to the affairs of this life; but Breezie, poor thing, was no saint, she was but a warm-hearted girl who had cried in her agony to her Maker.

Once more she thought of her lover. How should she meet him next? The sun of her existence seemed eclipsed. All must be over between them now. How bright the world had looked one short hour ago. How dreary and dismal all seemed now. Yes, she could never be his. Not only was the taint of insanity in her veins; but there was even a stigma on her birth. Had her mother been truly married? Oh! yes, she must have been; but to whom? How was she to ascertain that? Had not he whom she had so long called father, and of whose love she could not doubt, told her that he saw no way of solving that mystery?

Why had he told her? Ah, she saw only too clearly. He would not have given her unnecessary pain. He saw it as she did. It was impossible she could wed Jack Travers. Then she fell to wondering. Did anybody else know all this dread-

ful story? Was Mrs. Bartley acquainted with it? Did any other of her acquaintance know the truth—that she was an impostor, with no right to the name she bore? Breezie's face flushed again at the idea that she was actually nameless!

Tortured with such thoughts, she at length arrived at the conclusion that she must know more, or, at all events, have these points cleared up for her guidance. Having bathed her face and re-arranged her hair, she once more descended the stairs and entered the drawing-room.

Cis was writing steadily at his desk, but raised his head and put down his pen at her entrance.

"My darling!" he said, rising and coming towards her; "this shock has been too much for you. Sit down in this big chair."

"Papa," she replied, with a faint smile; "my head aches cruelly. I have been shaken to pieces. Thank you," she continued, gently, as Cis conducted her to a huge arm-chair, generally his own peculiar resting-place.

"I knew it would be all very painful for you to hear," he said, after a silence of some few minutes. "I thought over the question for a long time, whether it was necessary you should know all this. I hope I have not pained you needlessly; but I came to the conclusion at last, it was only right you should."

"I know you wouldn't have told me otherwise," she said, in a low voice; "but now I must know more. Does anyone else know, or suspect this? Does Belle know anything of it?"

"She! certainly not. To the best of my belief neither does any one of my friends. Some of the older amongst them may indistinctly recollect the sad story of my engagement with your poor mother, that melancholy trial, and perhaps a very few may know so much of your mother's end as I have told you, that is, as far as refers to her loss of reason and subsequent death."

"For whom, then," muttered the girl, "do they take me?"

"For my daughter. That's easily accounted for. Immediately after your mother's death I went abroad, and for some

years lived backwards and forwards a good deal between this and the continent. At your grandfather's death I took you abroad, where, as you know, you were brought up. When some twelvemonths ago I brought you back to this country for the first time with me, it was easy to tell the few it concerned that I had been married, and lost my wife years ago in Germany—as abroad, I had always said your mother had died in England. When I urged your claims on your mother's relations, I found them people living far away in the country. In my wandering life, my associates thought nothing more likely than I should have married somewhere abroad, and were little likely to ask any particulars. No, the secret of your birth rests really with people as unknown to me, as who was your mother's husband."

"How good you have been to me! Thank you, I will go and lie down a little now. Don't be afraid," she said earnestly, seeing his grieved, anxious face, "I intend to be very brave about it all, I ought, for your sake; but it comes hard, you know, just at first; by-and-bye I shall meet it better."

She rose and left the room as she spoke.

Cis sat staring into the fire. He was chewing over again all those old memories. The ruin of his life. What he had thought to be in those days. What it had all come to. What he was now. He mused over that first recklessness that had come upon him at that time. His wild, reckless campaign on the turf. The fierce orgies of those days. The after-struggle for a livelihood. The softening influence that the charge of Breezie had ever had on him. How of late years she had been his pride and delight. Then he thought savagely of poor Jack Travers, who had necessitated all this disclosure.

"Well," he thought, "if not he it must soon have been some other; a girl with all her attractions was not likely to wait long for a lover. Was he good enough for her? No, but who was? who would fairly appreciate her warm, generous nature? What would she do about it? Would she tell her lover all? Ah,

well," he thought, "she must judge that for herself, poor child," and Cis turned moodily to resume his work.

Yes, he was not the first who had built up to himself an idol of fair china, that had proved but very common clay in the sequel. Our goddesses turn out not only women, but very weak and foolish women ofttimes. I am not one of those who would say that he who builds upon a woman's love buildeth upon sand; but verily while the glamour of love is upon them, men sometimes found their scheme of future happiness upon very shifty foundations. There are blanks as well as prizes in love's everlasting lottery. May ye who have drawn the latter be duly thankful for the blessing.

CHAPTER XXI.

REJECTED ADDRESSES.

SOME week or so after Langton's explanation with Breezie, Jack Travers might have been seen comfortably ensconced in the mail train on his way to town. We last took leave of this gentleman on the rail in a rather depressed state of mind. To-day we find him sanguine, nervous, and excitable. Perpetual dropping will wear away the hardest stone, and Jack, by perpetual applications for leave on every possible plea, in defiance of every hint or rebuff, had at last wrung an unwilling consent to a week's leave from his commanding officer.

What a mistake it is ever yielding an unwilling consent. Refuse or yield gracefully, whatever your opinion may be. Should you do the reverse, the recipient goes away ungrateful. "Yes," he tells his *fidus Achates*, "I have bored or bullied him into giving me what I want at last." Ye in high places should stick to your refusals or give willingly. The applicant who, after repeated negatives, carries his point, will speak more

disparagingly of you than he to whom you said a firm and final 'No.'

Upon what plea Jack had finally carried his point, I don't know. He was once more speeding to town in all the state of nervous agitation that characterizes an unaccepted and earnest lover. Men, when ~~they are conscious of their~~ diffident of their

Travers, are conscious of having but few worldly advantages to adduce in their behalf. The clergy have one advantage over those of other professions on this point, they are always in the way.

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder,"

may be a very pretty poetical sentiment, but upon the whole, I think, I should prefer to be present. I don't recommend young men as a rule to fancy their sweethearts are all Penelopes; the shorter they make their absences the better, depend upon it. It is very pleasant to be consoled; it is not bad fun being the consoler. Things get out of shape upon these occasions, and in mutually bemoaning your absence, it is odds they forget you altogether.

Jack meditated a good deal during his journey. He had no friends to consult—no relations near enough to make their consent a matter of import. Upon the few knotty points of his life, usually consisting of financial difficulties or an unpromising Derby book, Jack was accustomed to consult his friend Herries—generally, after the manner of such applicants, paying no earthly attention to his advice when he had got it. But Herries had been the *confidante* of so many of Jack's *affaires de cœur*, that he shrank from confiding this to him, principally because he had never been so genuinely in earnest.

He pondered a good deal upon his chance of success, recalling, as men do upon such occasions, favourable smiles and favourable nothings, things that only lovers can notice or think about. Then, again, what light was Langton likely to see

it in? Was he likely to give his daughter to a man of such moderate income? Jack guessed pretty correctly that Breezie had no fortune of her own. Langton might point out to him that he possessed but slender means on which to support a wife. "Ah!" thought Jack, "if I hadn't been such a fool in my younger days, I might have been pretty fairly off now, and had something to offer her besides myself. Confound it! to think of all the 'good things' I've been in which just missed 'coming off.' Gad! I must have been born under the most unlucky star in Christendom."

On whirled the train, rushing through the Berkshire down and woodland, while Jack's brain whirled in rapid unison with it. Byron has said that rapid locomotion was favourable to thought, and hath not De Quincy written the "Glory of Motion." Hurrah! here we are at Paddington. How delighted our ancestors must have been at reaching their destination in those jolly days of fast coaches. One thing, if they did not travel so quick, neither did they live as fast as we do in their days. They lasted longer, and had not "done everything" by the time they were thirty. It is an open question on which side the advantage lies. If we laugh at their innocence at thirty, I think they could have turned the tables at fifty. Those fine old "two bottle of port" men, what constitutions they must have had compared to this feeble generation!

Jack drove to his lodgings, dressed, and then walked down to his club. "The Thermopolium" was not apt to be lively in these winter months. The members of that institution were for the most part out of town, hunting, shooting, &c., or supposed to be, though some of them did their field sports in obscure foreign watering places, and much edified their friends by their graphic description of tremendous bags, when the fierce whirl of London life began again. Those that were there dined sulkily by themselves, and upon being accosted, seemed to think it necessary to explain their presence in town on the

score of "passing through," though the club porter could easily have exposed such transparent mendacity.

Jack was progressing through the usual cutlet and pint of pale sherry, the prosaic rendering of the Lucullus-like banquet which the women of England, in the fertility of their imaginations, are wont to regard as a club dinner, when he was delighted by seeing the table next him occupied by Coningsby Clarke. They exchanged greetings warmly, after the manner of travellers in "the desert."

"What brings you here at this time of year? Why are you not hunting?"

"Have been," quoth the Hussar. "My present object in town is to *dine*. Don't you know that my present military residence is a remote part of Ireland. No use telling you the name, it would convey no light to your understanding. Man may hunt; but man *must* dine, at least, occasionally. I haven't for some months. Such a mess, I give you my honour you can't co-
know ;

been justified in applying for a medical board. I think," continued Coningsby plaintively, "it must be the country, for old Jack Bolders, who manages our establishment, is a good fellow and likes his dinner."

"Don't know; but I should think it's the head of your mess more than the country that is in fault."

"Oh, yes," said Coningsby, "but then you've never been there. You don't know what the country is. It produces white boys, and orange boys, and all sorts of boys, turf donkeys and beggars; but as for anything to eat, except salmon, nothing! Potatoes are quite a delusion since the famine, their bacon is most inferior; of course there's eggs, they can't adulterate them, though even the hens, judging by the eggs we get at our mess, are engaged in a conspiracy to keep their productions till they are more full flavoured than one generally cares about."

Here Coningsby became involved in a tremendous conference

with the wine butler on the subject of some particular champagne.

"By the way," said Jack, "do you ever see anything of Delpré now?"

"No. You see I've been out of it lately; but I fancy you'd meet him on pretty nearly any race course in England. I hear he's 'in' with a very shady lot, legs, Jews, and that sort. A set who make money and are not at all particular how."

"Don't think he'd many compunctions of that sort when he left us. How long are you in town for?"

"Oh, I don't know, till I'm tired of it, I suppose. I half-promised to go down and shoot next week with Chirper Cherri-ton—know him?"

"No. But he was in the 'Bays,' wasn't he?"

"That's the man; they call him Chirper on account of his wonderful whistle and general chirpy character. Sort of fellow who can sit up all night, and then sing a comic song preliminary to eating a tremendous breakfast. I heard such a good story of him the other day."

"Go on, what was it?"

"Well, the Chirper's got a nicish little property down in Bedfordshire, not very big you know, but well preserved, and all that sort of thing, very tidy shooting. Last year he was introduced to a rich old uncle of his wife's, who'd been grilling his liver and stacking up rupees in the East somewhere for the last twenty years. The Chirper thought him worth cultivating, more especially as he seemed to take a fancy rather to his wife, whom he hadn't seen since she was quite a child. So he told him if he'd come and look them up in November, he'd give him fairish claret, and rather pretty cover shooting. The Chirper thought no more about it, he had shot his covers all but a couple he was keeping up for the race week. He'd got a party coming to stay with him for that—some 'pals' who would chaff hottish and give him a restless time of it if they didn't find pheasants. When one morning's post brought an avuncu-

lar letter, to say he'd be with him next week for a day or two at those covers of his. The Chirper was horrified, couldn't ask the uncle for the race week instead, he was full to the garrets for that event. Talked it over with the keeper. No, couldn't touch those covers, that wasn't to be thought of. Talked it over with the wife, she hit it off—clever woman.

“‘Uncle Antony don't know much about shooting,’ she said, ‘just try my schema.’

“Well, on the wife's advice, he told his keeper to send over to the fellow who took his game, for a hundred and fifty hares and pheasants or so, for the day. Of course, at that notice, they couldn't get 'em alive, but they got 'em *dead*! which, according to Mrs. Cherriton's plan, was quite as good. Then he wrote a few lines to Jim Chippendel, an ally of his, telling him to come over and shoot. Of course he told Jim all about it. Keepers, beaters, everybody were all well up in their parts, and then they started at a cover that had already been polished off pretty close.

“They put the old gentleman in the centre, and the fun began. Hare to the right, mark, cock; bang, bang went Jim. Cock over—bang, bang went the Chirper, and so they went on. At the end of each beat, the dead hares and pheasants came tumbling out of the game-bags, and by the end of the day, they laid out their two hundred head or so.

“‘Sinful this blazing cartridges at nothing,’ whispered Jim. ‘How unlucky you are, Mr. Douglas.’

“‘Quite disgusting,’ said the Chirper, ‘nothing ever seems to come your way,’ and he whistled ‘*Il Baccio*’ most melodiously.

“‘Yes, I am unlucky, I can't even see 'em.’

“All the tobacco in Jim's pipe, I hear, seemed to get into his throat at this, and made him quite hysterical.

“However, the end of it was, the old gentleman went away much pleased, said he had had two capital days' cover shooting, although, personally, he'd been unlucky.

"‘The fact is, my dear,’ he said, to Mrs. Cherriton, on leaving ; ‘I’m afraid I shall have to come to spectacles soon. My sight’s not what it was, and I can’t hear birds get up as these young fellows do.’ Of course there was something to shoot ; but it’s a dodge to make a day out of a baddish cover, isn’t it ?’

"I don’t quite swallow all your yarns, Coningsby," laughed Jack, "but it’s possible that might be true. Anyway, it’s too good a story to pick to pieces. Deuce take the fellow who won’t take a story as it comes !"

"Quite right, sort of brute who wants it proved legally by six perjured witnesses. No, that’s a fact, Jack,—that is as facts go now-a-days."

The morrow afternoon found Jack on his way to Fulham. "Yes, sir," said the maid-servant in answer to his ring. "Miss Langton is at home." Would he step up into the drawing-room ?

Jack ascended the stairs, and Breezie stepped forward to welcome him. She had been busy at her easel, by the side of which he had already passed so many golden hours, when, if there was little work done, both the artist and her admirer had been extremely well satisfied with the results of the afternoon’s labour. Misgivings came over him on her greeting. It was not the warm and sunshiny welcome he had been used to. There was a constrained coldness which, though not easy to describe, everyone can understand. Who of us have not at some time experienced it ?

Under these circumstances, of course, they talked of all sorts of indifferent topics. Jack was anxious to know how Mrs. Bartley was, and where. Laura and Lyttlereck’s engagement was discussed and dismissed. Breezie even manifested intense interest in the doings of the good people of Milton, of whom she had never as yet heard, and could never expect to hear again. It was the skirmishing before the battle ; the fitful gusts before the storm. Two people whose passions are mutually involved, cannot continue to talk platitudes long. It is squibbing over a magazine. A spark must light it ere many

minutes have elapsed. Breezie felt that the situation was unbearable. She could stand it no longer.

Rising, she said "That she would go and look for papa ; he would be so annoyed if he missed seeing Mr. Travers."

Whizz ! the spark has caught ! the explosion is imminent !

Jack's mind was thoroughly made up ; that the moment was unpropitious he felt intuitively. The Fates were against him, he knew ; as men have known before on occasions of mightier import, if woman will allow that in man's life there can be such. Still, he felt if he was to speak to-day at all, it must be now. Stopping Breezie on her way to the door, he said :

"Pardon me, Miss Langton ; we have been talking nonsense—at least, I have. Will you listen to me patiently for five minutes?"

Breezie flushed, but sat down as she replied :

"I think I had better not. I *know* I had better not. Let me go."

"I will detain you but a few minutes ; but what I have to say I came determined to tell you. It may be egregious folly, vanity, presumption ; but I hoped when I came here to-day, to induce you to listen to me. That I love you dearly, you know as well as if I had said so sooner. No woman could be in ignorance of that love. I have tried hard to gain yours in return,—I had hoped with some success. To-day your manner frightens me. What has risen up between us? Breezie, will you be my wife? I have but little to offer you, but you can never be more truly and honestly loved. If you will take me, believe me, no sorrow or care that man can avert, shall ever come near you. Never shall wife be cherished more tenderly than you."

He took her hand here, and for a few seconds she left it passively in his, then she withdrew it hastily, and rose from her chair.

"Mr. Travers, I must thank you for the honour you have done me ; but it cannot be."

"But why, Breezie, dearest? Surely I cannot have made

such a mistake? If ever woman's eyes spoke love, yours have. I know your nature well. You are no heartless coquette. It is not in you to make a man love you for the pleasure of throwing him off, like a soiled glove. If you never loved me, why make me think so? I'll not believe so vilely of you, as to think you have brought me to your feet to gratify your vanity."

"And you are right," she murmured, involuntarily; "but forget all that has been between us. Think what you will of me, it is not in my power to defend myself. Think I have behaved badly—think me heartless, vain, untrue; but still think that all is over between us."

"I will not think that," he continued sadly. "Give me some inkling of the truth, Breezie. You can't be sporting with an honest love? Will you say you don't love me, you can't love me?"

"You try me hard," she replied, proudly. "You ask questions, sir, that fall hardly within your province. Enough; I have told you that I cannot marry you."

She had to call all her pride to her aid, poor girl, for she knew that she loved him dearly, and in his eyes must appear to be treating him disgracefully.

"Yes," said Jack, "and did I not know you better than you know yourself, I would take your answer, sadly and sorrowfully it may be; but you are not telling me all. I want to know why you have changed so suddenly."

"It can matter little what my reasons may be. You have had my answer; it is unkind, unmanly to press me further."

"Breezie Langton," he returned, in a steady voice; "if there was one thing more than another I revered in you, it was your truthfulness. My unswerving, implicit faith in that alone gave me courage to ask you to be my wife. I have seen plenty of flirtation and coquetting in my time, but *it is not in you*. I see I am wounding you. I will ask no more. You tell me it can never be, that my cause is hopeless. You refuse to give me any reason for so deciding. Be it so; nothing shall shake my faith in your rectitude. For what reason you have led me to

hope that I might win you, only to reject me when I speak, I can't tell ; but I cannot believe that *you* have condescended merely to gratify your vanity."

Breezie's eyes sparkled, and her face flushed. Drawing herself up to her full height, she answered him :—

"You do me no more than justice. It may be unmaidenly, it may be unwomanly, to tell you so ; but as you have believed in me, so I believe in you. I tell you now that I love you ; how dearly you may never know, and never more than at this minute, when I tell you I can never be your wife. I cannot tell you more ; you must rest contented with the bare fact, that things have come to my knowledge, since we last met, that have made it impossible. Believe me, when I tell you, had I known what I now do sooner, I would have spared you this pain."

Here her voice gave way. Jack sprang towards her ; for a few seconds she yielded to his embrace. Passionate kisses fell warm upon her cheek ; words of love were whispered in her ear ; her head rested on his breast. Suddenly she extricated herself from his arms.

"Good-bye !" she exclaimed. "May God bless and ever prosper you ! Think as kindly of me as you can !" and she was gone.

Jack stood like one stunned. What did it all mean ? She loved him. What was this mysterious affair which forbade her to marry him ? Yes, that was the only thing to do—he would wait and see Langton ; tell him all, and hear what he said. "I suppose it's the old story," thought Jack ; "I haven't money enough. Langton has been telling her that she will have nothing—that I have nothing to speak of ; that it's a mere girlish folly, and she must give me up. He's right, I suppose, but I'll stay and have it out with him ; I'll never give Breezie up till she gives me."

A less sanguine lover might have thought that she had done so in the interview just terminated ; but that idea never oc-

curred to Jack. After the manner of the men that win in the long run, Jack thought there was but a difficulty to get over. Women seldom marry those who first tell them they love them, but those who keep on continually telling them so. They may not even like the man at first, but they marry him in the end. They cannot help feeling the compliment implied by the steady devotion that nothing can repel. They yield at last—at times to repent bitterly. Husbands sometimes revenge themselves for their servitude, and lead Rachel a very hard life of it afterwards. A step on the stairs interrupted Jack's musings, and Cis Langton entered the room.

The usual greetings passed, and then Travers plunged at once in *medias res*. He told his story, and told it well, as men are apt to do when deeply moved, and speak in earnest. "I love her honestly and truly," he said, in conclusion. "I know I am far from being rich, but we should have enough to get along on. God knows, hundreds more worthy may seek her hand. Tell me what you think—what you object to. It may be remedied."

"Stop a moment," replied Cis, "and don't interrupt me till I have finished. I don't disguise to you that I think Breezie might have done better; but as far as I am concerned, providing she marries a straightforward, honest gentleman, which I know you to be, I should have no objection. You would be poor; she has never known what it is to be rich. There were certain circumstances in Breezie's family history, which, perhaps foolishly, though from a desire of sparing her pain, I never communicated to her till some few days ago. They have affected her deeply. They were as painful for me to relate as for her to listen to. My only advice to her was never to engage herself to any man, to whom she could not first confide that painful story."

"Good heavens!" burst in Jack, contemptuously, "why didn't she—as if any family history could make the slightest difference to me. If half her relations had committed forgery,

and the remainder arson, what should I care? I beg your pardon, I don't know what I'm saying, I could say anything."

"Well, Travers," said Cis, smiling, "our family secrets are not quite of the tremendous nature you suppose. Still, I'm speaking to you in the strictest confidence; our secret is one which would make some scandal and talk even in our little world, though you may believe me, when I say no blame could attach to Breezie or myself. But the world is hard in its judgments. You might feel it deeply, if that world you live in turned round with its envenomed tooth on your wife, innocent as you knew her to be, soon after your marriage. No, Breezie is right, unless she can entrust you with her secret, she can give you no other answer."

"God help me!" said Jack, "and is some miserable scruple like this to part us. Some mock idea of pride on her part. When I ask her to marry me, do I not expect to bear her burdens, her trials, her sorrows—to participate in her griefs, to shield her as much as in me lies from all such? She loves me—she said so, and are our two loves to be crushed out, destroyed for a mistaken want of trust in him to whom she has already given her heart? Tell her to come down, and that nothing she can tell me will make any difference in me. You never can have loved, or you would not talk to me in this cold-blooded way."

"Never loved!" said Cis, starting to his feet, while his mouth twitched and his eyes flashed again. "Never loved! When you have loved for years, to be deceived; when you have spent months tracing that lost love; when you have discovered her only to find the light of reason extinguished; when for months you have watched her gradually sinking without one glance of recognition meeting yours; when your caresses and kind words have been met by vacant eyes and unmeaning babble; when in her death throes your pulse has bounded to hear your Christian name once mentioned; when you have laid stretched in agonies, that shook not only your frame but your very reason, on

the tomb that covered your heart's blood,—then talk to me of love !”

Jack stared aghast ; the fierce torrent that had burst from Langton's lips swept away his more gentle river of love, as the tumultuous mountain stream overrides the summer brook. Yet his love was as genuine in its way.

“Pardon me,” said Langton, resuming his seat and his accustomed manner. “It's not very often I forget myself in such fashion. Not ‘whist,’ is it, losing one's head in this way ? Now listen to me—I like you. I believe you love Breezie, honestly and sincerely for herself, and she is worth it. I have no intention of influencing her one particle in this matter. But I tell you this, you could not have asked her to marry you at a more unfortunate time. You see, she is overwhelmed by the disclosure she has heard. In the purity of her own heart she magnifies it till it seems to her inconceivably worse than it really is. She has had as yet no time to accustom her mind to it. She naturally, at present, shrinks from even touching upon it. And yet, if I read her rightly, she will give her hand to no man to whom she has not first given that confidence. I am not whispering hope altogether to you. I merely say, your request, as it happened, was ill-timed.”

“Then you think,” said Jack, “that if—”

“I think nothing,” interrupted Langton, “except that you will be too late for dinner anywhere if you don't go now. I can't offer you any here, for obvious reasons.”

“Good-bye,” said Jack. “Thank you very much. Pray excuse me, if in my own grief I unwittingly wounded you. It was very stupid, no doubt ; but I could think of nobody but myself just then.”

“Good-bye,” said Cis, laughing. “We don't expect men in your state to think of anybody ‘bar one.’”

Jack left Fulham in a state of considerable depression, notwithstanding ; as he walked along West, however, his sanguine temperament rose immensely. He had been rejected, it was

true, but then had not Breezie owned she loved him? What man would not that console for a refusal? Langton, too, would throw no obstacles in his way. Then he thought over what Cis had told him, and determined to make no further movement at present. Yes, he would, he would write the sort of letter that while it excluded any answer, yet conveyed the assurance of his unalterable affection, and then—well, yes,—then he must have patience and wait. These and similar reflections brought him to the door of the Thermopolium, on the steps of which institution he found Coningsby Clarke dejectedly smoking.

"How are you, Jack?" observed that very bored gentleman. "You're a nice lot, ain't you. Said you'd turn up to smoke last night, and never did. I don't complain so much of you in particular, but nobody else did. There was no pool, no whist, no society; I was driven to reading Ruff's Guide, and moralizing on how foolishly I kept investing my money last year. What are you going to do to-night, dine here?"

"Yes, with you if you like. Let's dine early, and go somewhere in the evening. What is there to see? Let's look at the playbills."

"Done with you," rejoined Coningsby, "and we'll go to the Olympic; there's a little man just come out there, they tell me's a clipper, and I vote we go and see him."

"All right. You're good at ordering dinner; go and do it while I go over to my lodgings and dress."

So they two dined together, went to the Olympic, and came back still shrieking over the drolleries of that then rising, now alas, set star Robson. In the smoking-room they had much pleasant talk, and finally Coningsby suggested they should go down on the morrow to some suburban steeple-chases, to which Jack having nothing to do, and feeling that Fulham was closed against him for the present, assented.

"Now, none of your infernal laziness," said Coningsby, as they parted at the door. "Don't forget we breakfast here together at half-past ten sharp, and start soon after eleven."

"All right, I won't be late."

"No, don't, please. I haven't seen a bit of racing for a long while, or, for the matter of that, anything else, bar 'the finest pisantry' in the world. I'm told the scenery is great when you can see it; but the weather hasn't lifted during my residence in the country, so I can't speak personally. Good-night."

CHAPTER XXII.

DELPRÉ EARNs HIS WAGES.

SOME six or eight miles from London, in a beautiful undulating grass country, were held the Harrow Steeple Chases. It was what, to that excitable community the 'Turf,' was known as the 'dead season.' For a brief space, horses were allowed to relax their gallops; trainers, their vigilance; jockeys, their austerity of life; and the brazen-throated ring its roar. The latter, like the ocean, never altogether hushed, still twice a week sent forth its low murmurings from Tattersall's, reminding early backers of the fallibility of winter favourites, and causing regrets at having been in rather too great a hurry to be 'on.' Small steeple-chase meetings, however, are brought off at any time, weather permitting, as when the regular meetings once set in, a fixture becomes a matter of great difficulty.

In the vicinity of London, there will always be found plenty of racing-men tired of the monotony, of what is with pleasant assumption termed indiscriminately 'the recess' or 'vacation,' to patronize such meetings, and in these days speculation is sometimes carried on to a very considerable extent thereat.

Imbued with this spirit, many of the votaries of the 'green sward, silken jackets, and numbers up,' are ever ready for a turn at anything of the kind that may offer. The Ring would attend a donkey race, guarantee them a large field, and plenty of backers. It's their business, so why should they not?

Influenced by these circumstances, Jack Travers and Coningsby Clark, on their way down to Harrow, found a large and ever-increasing stream of people bound in the same direction. It was a very different concourse though from that which flocked to the Morctown Steeple-Chase. There was a sprinkling of the gentlemen who take an interest in the cross-country events. There was a strong muster of the betting fraternity, leavened with an unusual mixture of 'welchers.' Men whose capital consists of an eighteen-penny metallic book, a huge gig umbrella, on which their name is painted ('of Newmarket' is a favourite inscription, it gives confidence to the unwary), and some half-sovereigns' worth of change. Should they meet with reverses, their creditors are apt to find the firmly-planted umbrella *without* the proprietor under it.

There were many of the order of licensed victuallers, who drove down in smart gigs with knowing short-tailed horses. There was an unmistakable number of 'roughs,' and a considerable proportion of gentlemen, whose low retreating foreheads, closely cropped hair, and generally brutalized countenances indicated them as connected with the fighting interest. Examining the crowd generally with the eye of a physiognomist, you would have found greed and rapacity the dominant characteristics as opposed to love of sport or pleasure.

Our two friends made their way to the stand, which was a temporary wooden building on a tolerably large scale. It was well filled, and the enclosure in front even still more crowded. Speculation was brisk, at all events on the principal event of the day, 'the open steeple-chase.' Two smaller preliminary races were decided, and then up went the numbers for the race of the day.

"Halloa!" said Jack, "here's Delpré up on something—what is it?"

"Mr. Hart's The Unknown," replied Coningsby, looking at his card. "I should think he's worth backing. I know he always has the pick of the mounts in that stable, and they're

clever. By-the-way, he's got another in ; here's Mr. Hart's boy mare Selina, but I should think Delpré's on the best."

"Here's Plum, too, riding something ; he's a great man in the north country. I saw him do Charlie Repton very cleverly last year at the 'Moretown Hunt ;' but it's not often he comes South."

"No ; Plausible Plum, isn't it ? that's the name he goes by. Ah ! I have seen him ride up in the North, and a very good man he is too. They swear by him in Yorkshire. He's on Light of the Wolds—comes from his country, I should think, by the name. Ought to be something good, or they would never have brought it so far, or Plum either."

"Scarcely—shouldn't wonder if it's a real 'good thing,'" said Jack, his mind reverting once more to what had so often proved a delusion and a snare. As I have said before, 'good things had been the bane of his existence, not, perhaps, that he was singular in that respect.

"Come along," cried Coningsby, "let's push into 'the ring' and see what's going on ; we must have a shy at this, I think. Can't come down here without going in for a little speculation."

"What are you doing, Captaining?" inquired a greasy-looking hatchet-faced man, addressing Coningsby. He was habited in a long thread-bare paletot, suggestive of very little shirt underneath ; his head surmounted with a wide-awake, a good deal the worse for wear. A common enough type on a race-course.

"Nothing as yet, Sam ; I've just pushed in to see what's doing. I suppose they'll make a favourite of this thing Captain Delpré's going to ride, won't they ?"

"Don't know, sir," replied that individual, who was a 'tout' by profession. "Shouldn't recommend you to back it if they do. The Captain of late has been a very unfortunate man. I don't mean to say *he* won't let their heads loose ; but he's been the wrong side a good many flags lately ; horses have been making mistakes with him the far side the course, and several such like accidents. That Hart lot he rides so much for, ain't

over and above square. They don't want no lessons in making safe and roping, and it ain't that easy to know how their money goes. You just hold on here a bit while I runs round ; I'll pick it up quicker than you can," and the greasy paletot shot into the crowd.

"Tout, of course," said Jack. "Is he good of the kind?"

"Yes, he is, especially at these little meetings round town. Last year, when I was quartered at Kensington Gate, I went to nearly all of them, and he gave me one or two deuced good hints, and as I was always pretty liberal to him when they came off, I've no doubt he'll tell us all he knows or can make out."

The betting, as far as Travers and Coningsby could see, fluctuated extremely, as it often does, more especially in meetings of this description. Delpré's mount, *The Unknown*, was at first a great favourite ; but 'the ring' seemed never tired of laying against that animal, and habitués of the Turf could easily discern that it was the confiding public and not the stable who were supporting him. *Light of the Wolds* was becoming a better favourite every minute, and was evidently backed in right down earnest by those connected with the horse. *Selina*, Mr. Hart's second string, too, was apparently fancied considerably, and a good deal of money was being quietly invested on her.

At this juncture, Travers suddenly caught sight of Delpré. "Come along," he said, "here's Del. Let's see what he has got to say about his mount."

"How are you, Delpré? Do you feel like winning to-day?"

"How do, Travers," replied the Captain, as he shook hands. "How are you, Repton? Horrid cold, isn't it? See you in a minute, Tom ; tell old Hart I shall want to speak to him before I get up," and Davidson, to whom he had been talking, immediately left him.

"Win—well, I don't know, these cross country affairs are

always rather uncertain. I'm not very sweet on my mount. How's the regiment?"

"Oh, all right; but I suppose you are riding the best of Mr. Hart's, are you not?"

"Don't know; he's not the man to tell one much, and has backed both, I fancy. I've been out of luck too, lately, the brutes always come down with me; shouldn't wonder if this one did to-day, but I must be off to weigh, and so on; see you again, presently, I dare say."

"Well," said Coningsby, as Delpré walked away, "we didn't make much out of him."

"No, perhaps your touting friend may have more to tell us. Let's go back and look for him."

They returned accordingly to their former position, and had not to wait long before Sam made his appearance.

"Well, Captain," said that worthy, "as far as I can make out by the money, there's only two in it: that's *Light of the Wolds*, and *Selina*. I can't make out why Captain Delpré's upon *The Unknown* instead of the mare; but I see old Hart myself a backing *Selina* for hatsful. You may get what you choose to ask for nearly now about *The Unknown*. I never seen this Mr. Plum ride, but they tell me he knows what he's about as well as any of 'em, and they've backed it for a lot of money. It's rather a better favourite than *Selina*; one'll win, stand 'em both, Capting—*Selina* for choice."

The two gentlemen pushed their way into the ring, Coningsby following his touting friend's advice; but Jack, led away by an acute idea of winning long odds, backed '*Light of the Wolds*' and '*The Unknown*,' for the off chance.

"Now, let's get up stairs and see it run," said Coningsby, and the pair made their way to the top of the stand.

In the weighing-room, in the meantime, *Plausible Plum* was running through his usual gamut of grievances in the accustomed querulous falsetto tones.

"Of course," he said, "they've brought the wrong bridle, and

expect me to hold 'The Light' in a gimcrack like this. Nice pleasant ride I'm in for. Wonder whether they ever consider my neck in these arrangements."

Delpré looked at him savagely as he weighed in ; he said nothing aloud, but inwardly murmured, "By Jove, this ride may break it for you, my man," then turning to Davidson, who was close to him, he said, "Go and get me a glass of brandy, Tom, either it's cold, or my nerve is not so good as it was."

Davidson soon returned ; he found Delpré superintending the saddling of The Unknown, and talking to Hart ; he handed him the brandy, which Delpré tossed off neat as it was.

"Don't you be afraid," he continued to Hart, "lay as if it was dead, he shan't get round if it costs me my life ; I owe him a turn. Here, give me a leg up one of you."

He was promptly thrown into the saddle, gathered up his reins and made his way out of the enclosure. Things, in some senses, had gone wrong with the Captain since his agreement with Hart. The Countess had not only recovered, but after some conversation with her sister had had little difficulty in conjecturing who had stolen her will, a loss that she had discovered quite in the early days of convalescence. Furious letters on her part had been met by utter silence on his, and latterly all communication had ceased between them. Delpré was not the man to shrink from denial of anything ; but he was too clever to tell unnecessary lies. His sisters were acute clear-headed women, who, he felt, would not believe him if he did deny the will business : therefore, why say anything about it. He could disclaim any knowledge of the transaction always, whenever there should appear reason to do so.

Since his connection with Mr. Hart, he had undoubtedly been successful on the turf as far as the acquisition of money went ; but at what cost of social position none knew better than himself. He knew he was known and looked on as a regular "leg." As a leading partner in a stable notorious for mal-practices, as a gentleman-rider who had been more than suspected of "pull-

ing." He knew that men who spoke to him still in the betting ring would no longer know him in St. James's Street. He had taken his name off his club after a turf scandal, for fear of being summarily requested to withdraw. He had lost all caste, and was now utterly in the hands of Messrs. Hart & Co. The admiration of these gentlemen for his brilliant turf tactics knew no bounds. He had cast aside the last remnants of honour, principle and right feeling. His conceptions of clever robberies had been numerous, daring, successful, and just inside the law.

Messrs. Hart & Co. were delighted with their "master of the horse," and the firm generally were all down at Harrow in the prosecution of a daring scheme of turf villainy, which Delpré's master-mind had devised.

On the first appearance of the weights for this steeple-chase, Delpré had told his confederates that they could win with Selina. That as scandal was rather busy with their names, they having thought it a safer and more lucrative arrangement "to pull" their favourites lately, it would be advisable to win this time. "At all events," said that astute adviser, "if you don't mean to run straight, you must put up somebody else. I have been too unlucky lately, and cannot afford to lose again just yet on a first favourite."

With implicit faith in Delpré's judgment, the Hart set determined for once to make money honestly, and had quietly backed their mare for a good stake, when at the eleventh hour it oozed out that they had a most dangerous competitor in Light of the Wolds. Now Mr. Hart, who had been running Selina to lose for the last twelve months, was awfully perturbed at the idea of the coup being upset. In his turf speculations, he thought always nothing was so good as having a favourite and then not winning with him. Under Delpré's guidance, as he expressed it, he had put down his money on the other track, "and this is what comes of your infernal honesty."

Full of wrath he sought that gentleman, and commented with

considerable freedom and acerbity on what he was pleased to call his confounded cleverness.

Delpré took this with his usual coolness. "Don't be in a hurry," he said, "wait till we ascertain that all you've heard is true about Light of the Wolds, then I'll tell you what to do."

In the meantime, The Light won a good race in the North in a canter, and from all they could make out was good enough to beat Selina at Harrow. At all events, had far too good a chance of doing so to suit men who wanted as near a certainty as might be.

Once more they held a cabinet council on how they should manage to get out of their money.

"It's not so very difficult after all," said Delpré, at length. "A good luck will have it, we have got The Unknown in too, and he's pretty fit to run. He shall start, I'll ride him, and must put The Light *down*. These should be our tactics. Keep on backing the mare and laying against The Light, if I don't upset him never trust me again. But mind, Hart, I'll have a good share in this, for riding over a horse is not quite so easy as riding over a country. I'm not particular, you know, about my neck; but I shall have to chance an infernal fall here."

Mr. Hart and Company were charmed with the audacity of this scheme, and acted thereon. Such was the state of affairs as Coningsby Clarke and Travers looked on at the preliminary canters.

There were in all nine starters; but as the race lay virtually amongst four, I don't intend to introduce more than that number to the notice of the reader.

The first to go down in his canter was a useful grey horse, ridden by a man in pink, called The Friar, a horse of considerable local celebrity. He belonged to a large farmer in the vicinity, and the Yokels stood him to a man. Then came Light of the Wolds, a proud-looking steeple-chase horse, bright in his coat as a star, and evidently fit to run for his life. Selina followed, a weedy-looking thorough-bred mare, but a very neat

galloper with a wiry look that generally indicates lasting. Delpré was about the last, on *The Unknown*, a plain-looking weight-carrying hunter.

"Well," remarked Jack, "There's nothing goes and looks like *The Light*, he has a first-rate man up, and, bar accidents, should win."

"Yes, he's the pick of the bunch," replied Coningsby; "but they're mustering at the starting post now."

The flag falls and they are away, *The Friar* making the running at a slow pace. Delpré got off cleverly from habit, but soon pulled his horse back. His mission was to watch *Plausible Plum*, who was never in a hurry; in fact, *The Light* lay nearly last. Towards the end of the first mile, *The Friar* was leading, *The Light* lay last but two, one of which was Delpré, lying about three lengths off on the near side.

"It must come off hereabouts," muttered Delpré to himself. "We have got a fair distance from 'the glasses' on the stand, and the old brute may get outpaced if I wait too long. He has neither speed nor condition to keep with them when they begin to gallop."

They were running now across a large grass field, the way out of which was over a stake and binder with a ditch on the far side; a good fair hunting jump. Delpré ran up to *The Light*, and finding *Plum* made no effort to leave him, immediately pulled his horse back, watching his opponent closely. As they neared the fence, *Plum* steadied his horse for a stride or two, then sent him fairly at it. Quick as thought, in went Delpré's spurs, the dig bringing him almost up to *The Light's* girths. The two horses rose to the fence almost simultaneously; kicking his feet clear of the stirrups, Delpré gave a most tremendous jerk to his off bridle rein, thereby pulling his horse right across *Plum's*. They cannoned, there was a crash, and horses and riders rolled over in a confused heap into the next field.

Light of the Wolds was the first up of the quartette; one might say the only one, for *The Unknown* lay heels up in the

ditch. Delpré on the reverse side of the fence, with a cut on his forehead, was stretched pale and senseless, while a few yards further lay Plausible Plum, also apparently stunned.

There were several people standing round the jump, who at once rushed up to give assistance; two or three rushed after The Light, who was soon captured, having only trotted a short distance. Plum was picked up and put on his legs, half stunned and all abroad, but a practical man happened to be amongst the crowd.

"Here you are, sir; they've caught the 'orse. Put the bridle right, can't you, some of you? All right. Now, governor, here's a leg up. There you are," he said, as he chucked the still half-insensible Plum into the saddle. "Cut along—you'll perhaps catch 'em yet; there's a lots of go left in the 'orse, if you can only shake yourself together. At all events, if you send him along, you'll get near enough to see what wins."

The horse's head had been put straight. Luckily he was an easy one to ride, and the course at that point presented no intricacies; for the next two furlongs Plausible Plum ran mechanically, he was still all in a daze.

he began to recover his wits, and immediately set to work to calculate whether he had a chance left. His horse was going kind and strong under him. The leaders, it was true, were a good two fields a-head of him; still he knew that his horse had plenty of speed and bottom, and came to the conclusion that there was just an off chance for him, and it was worth persevering for. Steadily he set to work to catch his horses, and a better man for the purpose could hardly have been found. If Plausible Plum had one point in his riding he was rather proud of, it was his patience.

Few men knew better how to sit and suffer than he did. He had saved many a race through this invaluable quality.

A mile from home the position of things was this. Out of the original nine starters, four were disposed of. There was Delpré down, another had taken to refusing, and two more had

been run to a standstill. Gradually creeping up inch by inch, The Light of the Wolds still going strong, was fifth, though as yet a long way off the leaders. Two out of the four in front of him Plum could see had had nearly enough of it, he was overhauling them rapidly ; but Selina and The Friar, the latter still leading, were racing together, taking their fences almost simultaneously. The last fence but one he passed the fourth horse dead beat, and for the first time began to push his horse a little. The leaders were still a good hundred yards a-head of him as he took the third place, and jumped into the straight grass run in about half a mile from home, with nothing intervening between them and the winning post but a low hurdle. It was still a great deal to make up, and he knew he had no chance unless the pace should tell on the leading pair. Now pushing a little, now nursing, he still gradually crept up, the horse running stoutly and honestly under his judicious hands. The Friar, with half a length the best of Selina, cleared the last hurdle some six or seven lengths in front of him. He had drawn wonderfully up to them lately ; but he felt it had been at considerable expense. At the half distance they both began riding. Plum sat still as death. "If they don't cut their throats, I can't win," he muttered. They came back to him a little, but he felt that the fall was beginning to tell upon The Light, and that there was but one run left in him. Steadying him for a second, as he reached the Stand corner, he brought him boldly to the front, and gallantly did the horse respond. He had a gap of from three to four lengths to close, and for a second he almost reached the leader's quarters ; but The Light had shot his bolt ; he died away to nothing after making his final effort—and Selina first ; The Friar second ; Light of the Wolds third, was the Judge's verdict. Won half a length, two lengths between second and third, showed clearly to the Light's supporters how easily he would have won but for the *contresens*. Thus said the sporting journals, and with that and some laudatory remarks upon Mr. Plum's riding, his backers

lieve we mean business. Louis Napoleon is the only one who really understands the situation, and he means a big European war, to establish his dynasty—and he's about got it."

Such was the verdict of old Carribosh, who passed for the remainder of his days as a particularly well-informed man, on the strength of this lucky hit. "Clear-sighted man, sir, far-seeing politician," his intimates were apt to observe, when his name came under discussion. "Saw right through that Crimean business from the first." A fact they were by no means likely to forget, while old Carribosh, with his "Didn't I say so at the very beginning?" was alive.

About this time it suddenly occurred to the British Government that if they were really drifting into war, and, at all events, they were now committed to a demonstration, it would be a satisfactory thing to see if we had such a thing by us as a General Officer, who had ever commanded ten thousand men.

About this time, 'the leading journal' of England became severe upon the longevity of military and naval men, little seeing how speedily that misfortune was destined to be remedied—even among the higher ranks, at which the stricture was chiefly aimed.

"Administrations wither, Committees sit and die away; but Generals and Admirals live for ever," said 'The Thunderer,' as much perplexed as the Government, to indicate who was the man for the occasion.

The heroes of the Peninsula had for the most part preceded their mighty chief. At all events, such as were left, seemed men unversed in the improvements in the art of destruction, that is, military strategy; and whose years, for the most part, unfitted them for the onerous duties of the command of an active army.

The Indian school had never been properly recognized in this country, whilst some of their notable chiefs, it was notorious, had succeeded at 'great cost,' more from the inherent gallantry

of the troops they had the luck to command, than from any knowledge they had displayed of the science of war.

About this time it occurred to regimental officers generally, that it was probable their private affairs might require a little putting in order, and anxiously were the *pros* and *cons* canvassed, as to how far the patriotism of tailors and boot-makers might be counted on, in the event of an order for active service.

A nation drunk with peace and prosperity was throwing up its hat and cheering for war. A government which had sanctioned the annexation of Oude, was aghast at the immorality of the Russian, in wishing to seize on the dominions of 'the sick man.' No European aggrandisement. We must stand up for the poor Turks. Louis Nāpoleon said nothing, but laughed in his sleeve. At all events, he saw his opportunity and seized it with avidity.

"By Jove!" said Jack, as he and Coningsby sat down to dinner. "I suspect Britannia means business, and that we really are in for an European war this time. How do your people, that is the regiment, stand for foreign service, eh?"

"Pretty high," said Coningsby; "but, old fellow, if it's an
 way of soldiers, before a year's out."

"Suppose so," said Jack, as he tossed off a bumper of champagne.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART, GOOD-BYE."

FOR nearly forty years had England been engaged in "making calico," the great object for which, according to Sydney Smith, the Anglo-Saxon race appears to have been created, when once more, the atmosphere rang with the shrill clarion of war.

Boldly England answered to the summons, stepping in among the belligerents with about the same knowledge of the subject, want of preparation, and general unfitness for the encounter, that characterises the chivalrous, but slightly vinous gentleman, who, on his way home from dinner, interferes in a street fight.

"A mere military promenade," said some of 'the quidnuncs,' "much too clever a fellow, the Czar, to fight when he sees we're really in earnest."

Not quite so clever in their generation these last as old Caribosh, which means not quite so fortunate in their guesses.

The Guards had got their orders for Malta. Government had not, as some one said at the time, taken a proper view of the subject, or they would have demanded a schedule also of the officers' debts, with a view to immediate liquidation thereof, the repayment to take place from the quantities of prize money which would naturally accrue from the sacking of Moscow, or some more convenient place, in the next six months.

Government did not foresee much at that time, *much less that*; so the British officer was thrown upon his own resources, and pondered moodily on the powers of the "silver oar." One ingenious and enthusiastic Guardsman, so the legend goes, dropped his epaulettes, and assuming the garb of the private soldier, fell into the ranks, and so marched quietly past some pecuniarily interested acquaintance who would have fain saved him from

"Seeking a bubble reputation at the cannon's mouth."

Another line'sman of strategic powers was said to have passed some hours sitting on a buoy in the mouth of Cork Harbour, till the transport, on her way past, 'hove to,' lowered a boat, and picked him up. From all which may be deduced, that the nation was at all events loath to part with her soldiers.

In the general want of knowledge on all points that pervaded everywhere just then, the Army outfitters took upon themselves to decide what were the necessities of a campaigning life, and a very pretty thing they made of it. Some of their essentials,

it is true, failed considerably when put to the test. Many of them, for instance, had taken up the theory that all fighting would take place in a warm though showery climate. In one point they certainly all agreed—that there would never be any lack of transport, and that indiarubber in every shape was a *sine qua non*.

Soup was just finished at the mess of the —th down at Milton. As usual the discussion ran high upon whether they were likely to go; whether those that did go were really going to see fighting. The door opens, admitting a good-looking man of medium height, slightly grizzled hair, and dark moustache, and dressed in morning costume. Everyone rose, for all recognised at once the most popular general officer that ever commanded a district.

Bowing to the assembled table, apologising briefly for his dress, or rather want of it. "Gentlemen," he continued, "I bring you your orders, to be in readiness to proceed from here on Monday next, en route for Plymouth, there to await transport for active service."

"Hurrah," burst from every lip at the announcement.

"Now, Colonel," said the General, "I am going to ask you to give me some dinner, I am quite ready for it; I travelled up with the news myself, to have a last look at you all, and say 'good-bye.' I hope myself to be out with you ere long."

"I hope so, General," said Travers, who was sitting opposite, "and in command of our brigade."

"Thank you," replied the General, laughing, "I should like nothing better. How are you, Herries? ah, Rolls, you'll have to part with the brown horse. No more hunting for a while, you'll have to sell him and buy a service kit with the proceeds."

"Yes, sir," said Crumbs. "The horse would suit you, only I hope you'll be with us, and so won't want it—he's no charger."

What a cheery dinner that was; excitement was at its height. The steadiest pulses quickened that evening. Fast and furious was the chaff, loud and incessant the laughter, on the subject

of what were the essentials that could be contained in ninety pounds weight, to which rumour said a subaltern's kit was to be restricted. The band was sent for and loudly rang out 'The Papillon' and War gallops. The General's health was proposed by the Colonel, and drank with enthusiasm. Long after the seniors had departed, did a select knot, among whom Jack was a dominant member, sit drinking toasts. They drank "jolly old Milton." It's wonderful how enthusiastic you get about a place just as you are on the point of leaving it. They toasted "The Colours," "A successful campaign and plenty of loot," with divers other toasts of that description, finally breaking up brimful of wine, excitement and enthusiasm.

So the —th departed for Plymouth, and the Milton people cheered them on their departure. They had been a fairly popular regiment during their time there. Besides, soldiers stood high in public estimation just then. The band played "Cheer, boys, cheer," as all bands did in those days. England was intoxicated at the idea of embarking in another European war, and the commencement of the campaign was a cause of general hilarity. We wanted a few national laurels, "there are nae folk like our ain folk," as the Scotch song says, and it was high time to show the Continent what our army was made of.

Plymouth! one's heart melts, and one's mouth liquifies at thy very name. Rural metropolis that boasteth "the Junkett" and Devonshire cream as thy principal luxuries. To my readers who may not be acquainted with those divine conceptions, I would say hie thee to Plymouth and amend thine ignorance. No Devonshire jury, at all events, will convict thee of abandoning wife and children, if you plead the allurements of "the Junkett," the soft fascinations of Devon's cream. You may scoff at the summing up of the sternest of judges. Produce the delicacies in court and hand them up to the bench. We have been told of "the beauty,"—I speak in a feminine sense—of Dublin. Plymouth challenges it. Take Grafton Street in the season, and on a fine summer's afternoon the Hoe at Ply-

mouth shall eclipse it. I have known both cities, and stand boldly on my assertion, admitting cordially, as I do, how much beauty may be seen in the Irish Metropolis, I give my vote and adhesion unswervingly to Plymouth; besides, what has Dublin to put against "the cream," "the Junkett." Plymouth, at the time I am speaking of, was as full of excitement as any place in England. A large seaport, of course troops came flocking in preparatory to embarkation. The dock-yard rang with the roar of preparation. Ships were being fitted; shot, shell, "vile saltpetre," and cavalry horses were being continually shipped. Large transports were calling in for final orders. Battalions were mustering; bands were playing; in short, "Cheer, boys, cheer" pervaded the whole town, occasionally exchanged for "*La donna e mobile*," which last London's season had made the rage. A very curious article might be written on what have been the popular airs to which nations have armed for the fight. "Cheer, boys, cheer," was undoubtedly the great air with which the British Army marched for the East. The French played "*Partant pour la Syrie*." When the British Army next poured abroad *en masse* for the Indian Mutinies, I should say "Fare thee well my own Marianne," was the air of the day; that again has been superseded by "Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye." For the Waterloo campaign, "The girls we left behind us" was the air of the hour. In the American struggle, though there were, of course, many on both sides, yet "Hail Columbia," "The star-spangled Banner," and "John Brown," were the dominant airs on the side of the North; as "My Maryland" and the "Bonnie Blue Flag" were on the side of the South. In the days of Marlborough and Eugene, "Marlbrook" was the popular melody. Everybody has heard of "Lilliburlero," "Boyne Water," and "Croppies lie down," in connexion with Ireland, though the first is no Irish air. Were not the songs of the Cavaliers, and even still more so, those of the Jacobites famous?

There is something in it. If you must go to war, pick out

a good air to begin with. Depend upon it it's an essential. Nobody has yet given us any information on this subject, with regard to the last great European campaign; but I, for one, am extremely anxious to know what was the popular air in the Prussian, also in the Austrian, army, previous to Sadowa.

In the meantime, Her Majesty's —th are preparing for active service in the old citadel at Plymouth. The doctors are daily discovering that fine soldiers on parade, upon being medically tested, have got through their constitutions beforehand, and are consequently unfit to face the hardships of a campaign. Already the ominous dearth of men to fill the ranks might be predicted, should the army be called upon to fight and suffer as it inevitably must, if all was not to end in a mere demonstration.

Parents and relatives of all kinds were flocking down to Plymouth to have a look at young "scapegraces," better loved, perhaps, than they deserved, who in many instances were fated to cause little further anxiety, and never to be seen again in this world. Few, if any, knew what a terrible struggle it was destined to be. Never was Plymouth more gay than at that time. Seldom had the —th passed a more cheery evening at their mess, than upon the last night before finally closing it, for the purpose of packing the plate and paraphernalia which had of course to be left behind. There was a large muster, every officer of the regiment was present, and numerous guests were there besides. Late was the *séance*, loud was the laughter which chorused the final stanza of the final song.

Through all this whirl of gaiety and dissipation, Jack Travers floated with the stream. Yet his old comrades noted that though 'with them,' he was not 'of them.' He, formerly the leader in every description of fun and frolic, now joined in them mechanically. His *verve* seemed gone. One would have said the whole thing bored him. It did. Jack had suddenly discovered that pleasure is not the *summum bonum* this world can afford. Breezie's farewell look haunted him. Again and again he mused over that last interview—the tremulous, yet

half-defiant tones in which she had owned she loved him, still vibrated in his ears. Again he thought over that moment she had yielded to his embrace, when for the first time their lips had met. What could he do? Should he write to her again? No; he must see her once more before he sailed.

But how? Leave of absence just then was perfectly hopeless. There was plenty of work to be done, and it was useless to think that the Colonel was likely to spare any officer just now. Besides, the transport destined for the —th might come in at any moment; indeed, was hourly expected, and it was known would delay at Plymouth no longer than was absolutely necessary to embark the troops.

Long and painfully did Jack ponder over all this, till at last he was fain to confess that his chance of seeing Breezie again before he left England was hopeless; but he would write to her at the last moment, that he determined. He was walking moodily back from parade to his quarters one morning, when a man whom he at once recognised as a porter of the 'Royal Hotel,' put a note in his hands.

His heart beat thick and fast, as he recognised Breezie's somewhat bold calligraphy. Tearing it open, he read the following:

"What I have done I fear would be looked upon as un-
maidenly by most. Had there been any other course, I would
have adopted it; but papa has left England as a 'Special Cor-
respondent,' and I have none to advise me. If you love me as
you say you do—you, at least, cannot misconstrue me.

"My dearest, I cannot let you go without seeing you once
more. I may know little about war and campaigning, but
everyone knows that many die, though some may come back.
It may be I shall never see you again. You thought I dealt
hardly with you the other day; but you believed me when I
said I loved you. I acted as I thought, and still think, right,
and believe me that I suffer more than you. Women always
do; we have nothing left us but to sit down and cry.

"Still I felt I must see you once more. I have dared the risk. You will not think ill of me. No; you cannot. If I thought you could, I don't say my heart would break, but it would assuredly know more misery than it ever knew yet. I know I am outraging the proprieties, but I care not, I was brought up to hold them cheap. I trust in your truth and honour to place no wrong construction on my rashness; but I love you, so I could not bear that you should leave without my seeing you once more. I know all I have risked, I know whom it is risked for. I know that should scandal ever be busy with my name, you will right me, whatever the cost. If I have read you wrong, God help me! for I shall need it sorely. Come to me here this afternoon, as soon as you can.

"Your own,

"BREEZIE.

"Royal Hotel."

Fortunately for Jack, his duties were over for the present and no sooner had he perused the above than he started for the Royal Hotel.

Not an idea of anything unwomanly in Breezie's strange conduct crossed his mind for a moment. He loved her too truly to think of her in any light but that of a pure loving girl, whose love he had been fortunate enough to win. That Fortune had favoured him more than he deserved was his sole thought, as he hurried down from the 'citadel' If she had risked much to see him again, he would try hard to show her he was worthy of such confidence.

He soon reached the hotel, and was at once ushered up to the sitting-room occupied by Miss Langton. She rose as he entered, and stood gazing at him with flushed cheeks and tear-stained countenance.

"Breezie," he faltered; for, somehow, Jack's self-possession had strangely left him at that moment, "how can I thank you for this?"

"Oh, Mr. Travers! what must you think of me?" and as she said these words, poor Breezie sank into a chair, and sobbed vehemently.

"Don't cry, my darling!" he rejoined. "Don't think for one moment that I have misconstrued you in any way. To me you are simply the woman I love too fondly to think she could act otherwise than as a sincere, honest maiden might. For this great proof of your love, I thank you from my heart. I feel all you risk, and despite the joy it brings me, half tremble at the peril you incur. Tell me, Breezie, dearest, that you recal your 'No,' and that I may yet hope to make you my wife."

"I knew I might trust you," she said, smiling through her tears. "Whatever may be my answer to that, you'll hold me a lady true, I know now—I am going to act according to my dear father's advice, and tell you all."

Briefly she told her story, how her mother had been illegitimate; how, for all she knew, she might be also; how, she knew not who her real father was; how between him who had been to her a father, and herself, there existed no other tie than the great love they bore each other.

She ceased, and stood facing him with sparkling eyes, and still trembling lips. Till that moment she had hardly realised how much she staked on that avowal. Yet she had thought over, too, deeply, and often, what should she do if he saw in it an insurmountable obstacle to their union?

He had listened to her silently. True, she had told him not to interrupt her till she had finished. He had spoken never a word; she could hear her heart beat, the colour came and went in her cheeks—would he ever speak! He had remained silent but a few seconds after she concluded—to her it seemed minutes.

Slowly he lifted his head, and looking steadfastly at her, said—

"And was this all that you sent me away so miserable for the other day?"

Her lips syllabled "all!" though the word was inaudible.

"Breezie, my love, you didn't do me justice, you should have known me better."

His arm was round her now, and her head nestled down upon his chest.

"Mine, now, then, Breezie, dear," he murmured, as he kissed her, "come weal, come woe."

"Yes, yours ever, Jack, now; you'll forgive me this escapade, won't you? I love you so, I could but see you once more. You can't know how I trembled at what you would say."

"You'll never be afraid to trust me again—say that, and I'll forgive your want of faith in me this time."

"Never," she murmured, "I trust you now and for ever."

I suppose all this was very wrong and indecorous on the part of Breezie; but ye daughters and matrons of England, be lenient in your judgment; many things of that kind were done at that time. Nature will occasionally burst the bonds of conventionality. You see we were not used to going to war just then, and our fair English girls, Heaven bless them, didn't take it quite so easily as the ladies of Ancient Rome were wont to. They didn't grudge overstepping the bounds of propriety a little, to say farewell to lovers they might never see again. And when their tears trickled down as they read some of those terrible return lists, I think it must have been a satisfaction to some of them, to know they had dealt kindly with those whose names were recorded therein.

The next forty-eight hours were, perhaps, the sunniest in Jack's existence. All the time he could snatch from his military avocations he dedicated to her. He showed her the dock-yard, at which Breezie marvelled greatly. He drove her out to Mount Edgecumbe. In the evenings he walked with her on the Hoe.

Scandal might be busy with their names, but absorbed in "love's young dream," they recked little of it. Conscious of their rectitude, they troubled their heads little about the world's

surmisings ; while Jack's announcement to his own immediate allies, that he was engaged to be married to the young lady with whom he was incessantly seen, stopped all regimental talk. Such sunny hours never last long, and the third afternoon the transport dropped anchor in the Sound. That evening, the regimental orders stated that the Battalion would parade for embarkation at eight the next morning.

Sadly did Jack announce the tidings.

"The ship is in, Breezie, and we start the first thing to-morrow. Embark on board the tenders at the dockyard at ten. The transport is to sail as soon as we are on board. She is lying out in the Sound."

"Oh, Jack, my love !" murmured the girl. "I knew it must be ; but it seems so hard to part so soon. No," she continued, "don't be afraid ; I am going to be very brave, I won't cry or be nonsensical, at all events, till you are gone. If I can't help it then, you won't know it."

"Come, Breezie, this won't do ; recollect you're to be a soldier's wife now, you must be plucky. Go and get your bonnet on, darling, come out on the Hoe, and let me show you our ship in the distance."

Breezie did as she was told, and they went out for their walk. From the Hoe Jack pointed out the great screw steamer destined for Her Majesty's --th. Long they walked up and down that fine April evening. They did not speak much—people don't on such occasions. "You'll write whenever you can," said Breezie, at length ; "please don't forget to let me have a letter from Gibraltar, I shall so count on it."

"Forget, my darling, no. You shall hear from every place that affords a chance of writing, and I also shall look forward to little notes. Mind they are not too short, that's all."

"Oh, Jack, as if that was likely. Longer perhaps than you will care to read, sir. But I want to come and see you off. I may, may I not ? Just at the dockyard, you know ; I won't be foolish, but very good ; I promise you."

"No, pet, better not, I think ; I can't bear to think of you down there in all the confusion and noise, with nobody to take care of you afterwards."

"But I can take care of myself," interposed Breezie. "I did," she said smiling, "all the way from town, to see somebody I wanted to see very much, and nobody interfered with me in the least."

"Well," laughed Jack, "I can't say I didn't like that. As instead of going away miserable, I'm about the happiest man that will sail for the Crimea."

"Are you, really ? Do you love me so much ?" (I wonder whether you can tell a woman you love her too often.) "But then, you see, you will be still happier if you let me see the very last of you."

"No, dearest, it's better not. I shall say good-bye to you to-night when we get back. It's getting time to go home now."

So they walked back to the hotel. Jack sat talking some time, and then resolutely wished good-bye. He left Breezie very tearful, and, as he walked up the hill to barracks, was conscious of a sort of choking in his own throat that was far from agreeable.

A bright April morning, and the assembly is ringing through the old citadel for the —th to fall in. That is soon accomplished, and they march down for the dockyard, "most creditably," as the local press recorded afterwards, "with every man present and sober." Which, considering they had been confined to barracks for the last eight-and-forty hours, with a most restricted use of the canteen, was perhaps upon the whole not so very surprising.

"As we ride through the suburbs asleep as you say,
Many a friend there will listen and pray,
God's luck to gallants, who strike up the lay,
Of boot, saddle, to horse, and away."

Many a window was thrown up, many a handkerchief waved,

many a cheer given to the gallant —th, as they passed through Plymouth and Devonport, still hardly awake, on their road to the dockyard. There they formed up and waited for the tender to come alongside.

Jack Travers was not with them, for just previously to leaving the barracks, he had been suddenly detailed for some other duty, with an intimation that he was to make his way to the ship in a small boat as soon afterwards as possible.

While they were still waiting for the tender, the attention of some of the officers was attracted by a girl closely veiled, very plainly dressed, evidently seeking somebody, and whose sobs were very palpable, notwithstanding the veil.

"Halloa!" said young Rolla, who was in the blithest spirits. He had just had his debts paid, and as he expressed it, "was all game for a row." "Here's a young woman a crying shocking about somebody, or some of us. It would be only proper to say a word of comfort to her."

"Hush, you young fool!" said Herries. "I think I know who she is. It's the girl Jack Travers is engaged to. She's come here to see him off, poor thing, and doesn't know that he won't embark with us. I think I had better go and tell her."

As he spoke, Herries walked across to where Breezie—for it was she—was standing, and raising his shako, said:

"I beg your pardon; but am I right in supposing that you want to see Mr. Travers?"

"Yes!" gasped Breezie. "Where is he? I can't see him here!"

"No; he is not with us. He was unexpectedly detailed for another duty just before we marched off. He will come off to us from the Hoe, later, in a shore boat."

"But when? at what time? Can you not tell me that?"

"No; I am sorry to say I can't. I should guess between one and two; but it is only guess work. Of one thing you may rest assured, that he will not come here."

"Would you—would you kindly tell him, with my love, that

"I came here to see him once more?" faltered Breezie. "He will know who it was."

"Certainly. Now let me call a cab for you."

"Thanks ; but I have one waiting at that corner."

"I will see you into it, at all events," said Herries. Breezie bowed. He escorted her across the yard, and silently handed her into it. Suddenly a thought struck him. "One moment," he cried to the cabman, who was on the verge of departure.

"Your best chance, I think," he said, "of seeing Travers, would be on the Hoe. He must cross it to get to his boat."

"Once more, thanks. May you have a prosperous voyage." As she said this, she half raised her veil, bowed, and the cab rolled on.

"Devilish pretty girl," muttered Herries to himself, as he strolled back to his men. "Jack's a lucky fellow."

Breezie drove straight back to the Hoe, and dismissed her cab. Despite her lover's injunctions, she had determined to see him once more ere he sailed. For a couple of hours did she saunter up and down with eyes ever vigilant in quest of the figure she knew so well.

Many women in that time, as oft-times before and since, wore their nerves, and ached their hearts out on similar errands. What will not lovers do for just one more five minutes' interview, for a few seconds more of the sweet agony of parting, to utter once again the same meaningless words that mean so much ; (you may laugh at the phraseology, but you can't deny its truth) to once more hear the old refrain to which hearts have bounded since the world began ? We may smile as our hearts grow grey as our head ; but I wish I could live those days over again all the same.

I daresay many another has much the same feeling.

In the meantime, Travers having got through his duties, had

thrown his prudential resolves to the winds, and dashed off to the hotel to say one more good-bye to Breezie. Of course he found she was not in, nor could any one tell him where she had gone. He lingered about the steps of the hotel till he dared no longer tarry, and then walked rapidly off to the Hoe to get a boat.

Breezie's quick eye discerned him at once. She caught him just as he was about to descend to the beach. They walked down together, and Jack engaged a boat.

"Now, you fellows," said Jack, "just keep your eye on the 'Mazeppa,' out there. You know how long it will take to reach her. When she looks like going in earnest come and tell me."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the boatmen; "but I don't think you'll have much time to spare. The troops have been on board some time. They're only waiting for the Admiralty boat, to see if there's any final orders."

I am not going to bore you with the twenty minutes' conversation that followed between the lovers. If you can't imagine it better than I can write it, you must be indeed sterile of imagination, or deficient of memory.

"Beg pardon, sir," interrupted the boatman at last; "but if you mean shipping by the 'Mazeppa,' there's not a minute to spare. She's fiddling her bunting like a girl does her piano. The Admiralty boats passed Drake Island."

"God bless you, my own darling!" whispered Jack, as he hastily embraced Breezie, perfectly oblivious of witnesses. Then springing into the boat, he cried: "Make her travel all she knows. Double fare, boys, and something over; but mind I must catch the steamer."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the men. They set all the sail they could, and worked the oars besides. It was a close shave, for the 'Mazeppa' had begun to move through the water, as Jack jumped on board.

For nearly an hour Breezie stood watching the ship from the

Hoe. She could hardly discern the masts, when she turned to walk back to the hotel with eyes half blinded with tears. She was no heroine, I am sorry to say, and had bidden her lover go forth to battle with none of the old classical sternness.

What am I to say for her? She was a warm, true-hearted English girl; of course she has behaved shockingly in the eyes of all right-thinking people, and proved herself but a mere woman in her hour of trial. A mere woman! Yes. With all the grand abnegation of self and capability to suffer that distinguishes a true woman's heart, your heroic dames are women to be revered; but to love, give me the soft blushing damsel that cries when you leave her on such occasions.

Sadly and despondently did Breezie make her trifling preparations for returning to town that night. She felt desolate—all alone in the world. Her father (for so I shall still continue to call Langton), gone, and now her lover; no wonder she felt miserable—nothing to do now, but go back to the small house at Fulham, and wait.

None but those that have tried it, know the wearing, wearying tension comprised in that little word. Campaigning may have its trials and troubles; but those who trembling watch the mails, have a far harder time of it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONSTANTINOPLE, MISSEI'S HOTEL.

A HAZY drizzling day; kennels overflowing; the ill-paved streets swimming in mud. An incongruous crowd dressed in every variety of costume you can conceive, but in which the long loose boot predominates. Every variety of patois and language. Strange oaths,

“Which a foreign tongue
Made still more savage and awful.”

had to rest satisfied. That he had been ridden at intentionally, Plum had no doubt; but the race was over. Delpré, the offender, had been carried away still insensible, his arm broken in two places, his head badly cut, and with what amount of internal injury the doctors at present had not been able to ascertain.

Great was the exultation of the Hart community; there was rejoicing among the tribes that night, the children of Houndsditch were glad, and the daughters of St. Mary Axe sang hymns of triumph that the Jew had again got the better of the Gentile. As a rule they have had the best of it from the days of the Philistines downwards. King John, if the legend be true, is the one exception that proves the rule.

Coningsby and Jack had seen the race pretty fairly from the stand, including the fall; to neither of them did it occur that that was anything more than an accident. Jack, in fact, reviled his luck as disgusting in the extreme, implicitly believing that Delpré would have had a great chance if it had not been for the accident, in which he was probably as correct as the general public usually are on such occasions.

As they strolled off the course, they were much amused at hearing a man, evidently, by his dialect and dress, a small Northern farmer. He was apparently an admirer and follower of the Yorkshire horse.

"Dal it all!" he exclaimed to a sympathising friend. "I'm twenty poond oot; I'd a deal better ha' stayed to whoam in the old farm-yard, and helped pick the mooock oot. Darned if ever I coom racing again amongst these Sootherners!"

They got back to town. Rumours of a rupture with Russia were rife at that time, and the Clubs were full of it.

"Well," said an inveterate newsmonger, as they alighted at the door of the Thermopolium; "you fellows may get ready for a start. There's very little doubt about it now. We're going in with France to stop Russian aggression and prop up the Turk. We don't quite know what we are about. The Czar don't be-

still contributed yet another cargo of worn out, used up, suffering humanity.

Peace had been long, so long, that England conceived the millenium had arrived, now the lion was lying down with the lamb with a vengeance. The Army, for years deemed an incumbrance, had been gradually reduced to the lowest state of inefficiency. The power of England was at stake, and the nation trembled. To the first burst of exultation with which the glories of the Alma were received, succeeded the awe with which the announcement of the gallant stand at Inkermann was listened to. The blindest could understand the result of such costly victories. The moan for the dead eclipsed the bells and salutes. For the first time, perhaps, by 'the many,' the magnitude of the struggle was perceived. A cry arose against those whose hands had for years been tied by the inadequate resources placed at their disposal. The millenium dream—that men had grown virtuous and civilized, that commerce had completely superseded war, and cotton, cartridges—was rudely dissolved. Men's passions, and nations' tempers, were found pretty much the same as earliest history describes them; nor do they look more like changing now.

Misseri's Hotel in Pera, was crowded, (most courteous of landladies, let me once more salute thee.) It was literally the high change of travel. Men were going up to the front, and men were coming down from the front every day, England was putting forth the whole resources of her vast Empire; the telegraph wires were flashing orders to her servants and soldiers, in all sorts of remote colonies, to proceed forthwith to the Crimea. Here was a man only seventy days' journey from the Cape, there another only sixty from Hong Kong. From all her vast dependencies her sons were flocking at her call.

In the dingy-looking ante-room, off the Salle of the hotel, in

smokers. Seated close to the fire, with his arm in a sling, and

smoking a chibouque which kept involving him in considerable difficulties as to its management, was our old acquaintance, Coningsby Clarke. His costume, I need scarcely observe, was considerably changed since we last met him ; but he still wore his eyeglass with all his accustomed *sans froid*, while the damaged arm was the proud badge of a man who had ridden through the charge of "The Six Hundred."

"Awful weather," he observed ; "what times they must be having at the front. Wonder how those poor devils, who they say were caught asleep in their blankets the other night in the advanced trench, could manage to do it. Beg pardon, but might I trouble you to light this affair again for me ; deuced inconvenient these long machines for a man with a broken fin, must give it up, and take to a cutty again, I think, I give my neighbours so much trouble."

"Not at all," replied the man addressed, an officer only just recovering from the effects of being well in the thick of Inkermann. "But if you knew how our poor fellows were worked in trenches, you would not be surprised at their falling asleep anywhere ; they're like worn-out posters, it requires all our driving to keep them on their legs, and they'd chance the Russians not coming up any night for a sleep, if you'd let them."

"Thanks," said Coningsby, as with his *vis-à-vis's* assistance, he once more succeeded in illuminating the chibouque. "Yes, it must be pretty tough on them. It will be a mercy when we have pulled through the next two months ; you are going up again, I suppose."

"Yes," returned the other, "as soon as the doctors say I'm fit ; but I got a good bit mauled at Inkermann, and though there's no real harm done, yet I am still weak. The doctors say, and I feel they're right, it's no use my going back at present, as I couldn't possibly stand such work as they are having just now."

"About my case, I'm no use till my bridle arm's fit for work.

Halloo, here's a new arrival ; he don't look good for much either."

The new-comer walked into the room, supporting himself with a stick, though apparently more from weakness than anything else, and made his way to the fire. He was deeply bearded, but the haggard cheeks and sunken eyes showed he had gone through severe illness. He gazed into the fire moodily for a minute or two, and then looking round, his eye fell on Clarke.

"What, Coningsby !" he said in somewhat shaky tones, "don't you know me ?"

"Jack Travers, by Jove !" ejaculated that gentleman. "What the devil's been the matter ? You look like a ghost."

"Been pretty near becoming one, I fancy," replied Jack. "I got cut down with camp fever about six weeks ago ; they couldn't do anything for me up there, so shipped me down to Scutari. Dear old Herries saw me abroad, and that's about all I know about it. For rather better than a fortnight I have been in that infernal Scutari. Yesterday they gave me leave to come across here, and try and take care of myself for a bit ; I'm a deal better, but still as weak as water. I thought it was all up once or twice, but I'm round the corner now."

"Round the corner, of course you are. You'll live here, and do as Lilburne there," here Coningsby indicated his pipe-filling friend, "and I do, drink all the bottled stout we can lay our hands on. Eat everything that we can find wholesome, and be good to go back and have another shy at 'em before the month's out. Sit down here and tell us all about the old corps."

"They're pretty well, those you know, at least. Herries is tough, while Crumbs is the best forager and most confounded 'annexer' at the front. He's always 'happening on' stray ponies ; is supposed to trade largely with the sailors, and when I left was supposed to have acquired a goose by means that would have been accounted 'petty larceny' in England ; how-

ever, he gave, I heard, a most successful dinner party on the strength of it."

Coningsby laughed heartily as he remarked: "Yes, I can fancy Master Crumbs a very promising forager."

"You may say that, the young villain is never quiet an instant. He's always off somewhere the moment he's off duty. He's either acquired information on the subject of some porter to be got, some curacoa, hams, or a pony; for he's turned a most inveterate horse-dealer, and is always buying, selling, or swapping."

"Well, Jack, I'll tell you what we'll do the first fine day. I suppose this sort of weather can't go on for long. We'll go up to Koulalee, and have a look at the Russian prisoners there. A friend of mine has charge of them, it's only about four miles up the Bosphorus, and a beautiful row on a fine day—when you *do* get one here; though it's still winter, it is mild as English spring, not that that's saying much for it."

"I don't know that I could stand it," said Jack.

"Nonsense!" said Coningsby, "It's only getting to Tophana Steps, and then you lie in a caïque. Take lots of ruga. We'll take Mrs. Misseri's blankets if that's all. No distance to walk when you get there, my friend declares."

"Well, be it so, I'll trust myself to you. But how did you pull through Balaklava? for I haven't seen you since. I heard you were winged but would get all right; is it so?"

"Oh, yes, the arm's coming round. I can't tell you much about it. I only know we rode straight. You foot soldiers will give us credit for that, won't you?"

"Indeed we will," nodded Jack.

"Well, I found myself in about the hottest row I had ever been in. Fellows going down like nine pins all round me. Our formation all gone—how could it be otherwise when more than half of us were down? Then three or four fellows tried to rally us, and we got the word threes about, and an order to cut our way back. I had done pretty well up to that; but as I came

out, I got amongst a lot of those thievish Cossacks, and if I didn't get a thrashing, then it's a pity. God knows why, they never tried to use the points of their lances, but kept clobbering me with the butts; however, old Trumpeter's weight told, (you recollect my old charger) and I was through them at last, getting on gaily, when whiz came a rattle of rifle balls and down the old horse and I went together. I was soon up again; but with this arm dangling; the poor old horse, however, didn't rise, and I thought it was all over. Just then up came one of our sergeants, and wanted me to take his horse. Of course I wouldn't do that; but told him to ride on and let me take my chance. He jumped off, said, 'Hold his bridle a minute, sir, here's a loose horse I can catch.' He did, helped me on, got on his own and stuck to me till we were both out of it. If it hadn't been for him, I fancy I shouldn't be here just now."

"What a brick!" said Jack.

"Yes, he's a real fine fellow, Sergeant O'Leary, and if any one ought to think so it's I."

"Well, good-night, old fellow, I'm rather beat," said Jack.

"All right, don't forget Koulalee the first fine day," and Coningsby nodded good-night.

Some three or four days afterwards the sun shone out brightly. People who don't know the Mediterranean climate can have no idea what a delicious thing a fine January day is in those parts. The brightness of the sun, the balmy feel of the air, the clearness of the atmosphere, all combine to make it one of the most enjoyable periods possible. In the summer, the heat is too great. Then, too, there is the exhilarating feeling of being suddenly released from rain, snow, slush, sleet, &c. It may be they are to return; but who reckons upon that under those circumstances.

It was just one of these days when Jack Travers, supported by an attendant and accompanied by Coningsby, made his way with tottering steps to the Tophana landing place. A double-oared caique was soon procured, and the two friends comfort-

ably ensconced in the bottom thereof, were launched on the bosom of the Bosphorus.

I have seen many strange lands and much fine scenery in my time, but I still hold that nothing I know equals the Bosphorus. The palaces, the mosques with their slender minarets, the houses of the rich merchants, the background of hill covered with dark, solemn, stately looking cypresses, the lumbering but picturesque Turkish barges, the swift-shooting arrowy caiques, with their white tuniced, scarlet fezged boatmen, the flights of those mysterious never resting birds that go by the name of "*les âmes damnées*," from the old Turkish superstition that they represent the souls of those shut out from Paradise; the beautifully blue, clear, transparent water, with the equally clear blue sky over head, all together make it the most magnificent panorama in the world.

Lounging, smoking, stretched at their length in the bottom of their caique, drinking in draughts of health with every mouthful of the fresh air, our two friends wended their way up the Bosphorus, their grinning Greek boatmen bending manfully to their oars, occasionally giving vent to the stereotyped exclamation of 'Bono Johnny' to their employers. Passing the glorious pageant of hill, mosque, cypress and palace, that lay on either hand, after a pull of about an hour, the caique shot into a landing place, and the boatmen announced that Koulalee was reached.

They got out, and scrambling up to the old Turkish barrack that stood close to the water, Coningsby inquired for his friend. A few blunders and mistakes from confusion of languages, and then they were ushered into a largish room, singularly deficient in furniture, where, arrayed in a shooting-jacket, Turkish fez and slippers, was their host, a captain in the line, *nomine* Talbot.

"Halloa, Coningsby, old man, delighted to see you! How's the fin getting on, eh? Very glad to see you too, Mr. Travers; not that there's much compliment in saying so, for my life down

here is so monotonous, that I should welcome anyone heartily. Now, I won't say what will you have ? till I've explained what you can have. There's coffee, bottled beer, and raki, on the premises, with the Bosphorus close at hand, so make your choice."

"Beer, emphatically beer !" replied Coningsby. "I know nothing about raki, object to coffee in the middle of the day, and as for the Bosphorus, it will be quite time enough to try that, if these fellows upset us going back."

Pipes and bitter beer were consequently provided for the whole party. There being only two chairs in the apartment, the host seated himself on the table, with a chaffing remark that the Sultan had neglected to send down a few things from the palace so far.

"You must find it very dull down here ?" remarked Jack.

"Shocking ; but, of course, I hope to be relieved shortly. When I was sent here first, I was fit for nothing else ; but now I am all right again, and have been fighting some time to be relieved. My sole companion here is the old Turkish Pacha in command of the troops ; for I haven't above a score of men of my own. He comes in and does several pipes daily. We can't speak a word to each other, and get on solely by pantomime and the shibboleth of 'Bono Johnny.' Stay, I have taught him one word which he knows well, and when nobody's looking, nobody 'likes a drop of good beer' better than my friend the Pacha."

"Well, old fellow," said Coningsby, "let's have a look at your prisoners. Take us round your wards."

"All right," replied Talbot. "Will you come with us, Travers, or would you rather rest here ?"

"Oh, no," said Jack, "I'll hobble round too. I should rather like to look at some of the men who gave us such trouble that Inkermann morning. I suppose you have several Inkermann prisoners here ?"

"Yes ; but my great gun died this morning."

"Who do you mean ?"

"Don't you recollect the Greek Major who was taken at Inkermann, and was accused of inciting his men to butcher our wounded as they lay on the field? They tried him by court-martial drum-head, afterwards, and sent it in to Menschikoff for confirmation. Rumour says, Menschikoff sent back to say we had got him and must do as we liked with him. He was badly wounded, poor wretch! and was sent here. He was always under the delusion that we meant to poison him, and very often would not touch his dinner till I had tasted it before him. His heart, too, thoroughly failed him; he thought, if he got well, we should only hang him. This morning he succumbed and died, poor fellow! he was quite a skeleton."

Talbot now led them through several large wards filled with Russians, tall, fine, fair-haired young fellows, with a slight smack of the Calmuck in their features, and to an English eye, slightly deficient in breadth of shoulder. At last he asked them if they should like to see the corpse of the Greek Major.

They nodded assent, and with uncovered heads and reverent tread, they stood by that miserable bed-side. Wrongfully or rightfully accused, whatever his crimes, he was now in the hands of Him who made him, to account for his deeds. They gazed down upon the pale face, swarth features, long, straight, black hair, and the form frightfully emaciated by illness, to which despair had probably also contributed. Some women had loved that dark, stern, cold face—perchance in some far-distant Russian town there were little children who exulted at the sight of those saturnine features. Now all was blank! Tended by strange hands—hands that he believed would hourly drug the cup they handed him. With a conviction that convalescence doomed him to the hangman's hands; friendless and alone in his bitter agony, he passed to his account. If he committed the crime with which he was charged, verily he had his punishment in this world. God be merciful to him in the next!

Quietly they departed from the little room, shaded by the

majesty of death. Once more was Talbot's tap subjected to the criticism, and then with a hearty shake of the hand, they bade their host adieu, and started on their row back to Constantinople.

"By Jove!" said Coningsby, as they glided rapidly down with the stream. "How sick I should be of that berth—buried alive unless he comes up to Pera. Sebastopol might be taken, and it would be about a week before Talbot knew anything about it."

"Yes; it must be dreadfully dull and monotonous. Let us hope he'll soon get out of it."

"Let's see, it was after you had gone to roost, that that fellow told the story the other night of 'sewing up' the Turkish Pacha, wasn't it?"

"I suppose so; I didn't hear it. What was it?"

"Oh, it's nothing much, though it amused one at the time. He was on his way out here, and the ship in which he was went wrong in her engines somehow. Anyway, they had to put into Segri, a small port in the Island of Mitylene, to repair damages. A pretty little village he described it, with a fort that looked uncommonly like the paste-board arrangement you see in a transpontine melodrama. Of course there were a few soldiers in it, and it seems a Pacha in command. Determined to do the civil thing, they asked him to dinner; he came with his aide-de-camp, who it seems was actively engaged in ploughing, when sent for by his superior. The narrator said it was the most absurd sight he ever saw. The Pacha spoke of course no intelligible language, he eat everything that was set before him, and what's more, drank everything too! He sat there beaming all round him. Whatever his glass might be filled with, he took it up, smiled pleasantly, drained it to the dregs, patted his stomach, and exclaimed, 'Bono Johnny.' His natural thirst showed great capacity; but as the relator said, you can't expect to last long when you are taking alternate bumpers of champagne and bottled stout. Of course the Pacha suc-

cumbed, and was sent ashore in a state unbecoming one of 'the faithful' and a believer in the Koran."

"I should think that mixture would finish most men?" said Jack.

"Suppose it would ; it don't sound wholesome, does it ? Well, here we are close to Tophana, and what's more to the point, in excellent time for dinner. I don't know how you feel, but I am in a state of raging hunger. It's an amiable weakness, too, that the more one indulges here the better, as when we get back to the Army, appetites rather predominate over food. How I should astonish the coffee-room at the Thermopolium. Why, old Carribosh there, who passes his day trying to get fit for white-bait and venison in the season, would expire with envy on seeing my magnificent capacity. I recollect his describing to me, almost with tears in his eyes, some man he had met at a big city feed. 'Went in three times for venison, sir, he did, after the turtle, I'll give you my honour.'"

The two friends did ample justice to Mrs. Misseri's *cuisine*. The usual *canard* of a desperate sortie at the front was of course served up with the side dishes, giving rise naturally to an animated discussion as to who had got the best of it, which the whole thing being probably apocryphal, left, as may be supposed, a good deal to be said on both sides.

Late in the evening, when they were smoking in the ante-chamber, two or three men came in evidently rather excited. Coningsby raised his glass, and recognising one of them, inquired—

"Halloa ! what's the row, Richardson ?"

"Oh, nothing," replied the man addressed ; "I'm only cursing myself for being such an idiot, as to be about the streets of Pera after dark without a real good stick. I never was till to-night, and then of course I wanted it."

"Sit down and tell us all about it."

"Oh, I have nothing much to tell beyond a bit of good luck. We were coming out of the opera, and I had over my shoulder

one of those travelling bags. Suddenly I felt a snatch, knew my bag was gone, turned sharp, and saw a young Greek running like the mischief. It so happens I can run a bit, and I was after him like a shot. Where the deuce we went I don't know. I didn't gain on him at first, but kept him in view. At last he fell over some loose rubbish, and though he was up and off again very quick, of course I got pretty close to him. I ran into him at the top of some steps. Instead of the big stick I usually carry, to-night I had only a light one. Well, I gave him a couple of clips over the head, he called out something, threw up his hands, then began to fumble in his clothes, and I thought was going to give me back my bag; instead of which, the young brute drew a knife and came at me. Of course I hit him over the head pretty freely, the stick smashed all to bits, and I thought I was in for a dig in the ribs, when, to my intense relief, he bolted again. As he had his knife out, and it was right down into the slums, I need scarcely say I didn't follow."

"Can't say I see your luck in all this," replied Coningsby.

"No," laughed the other. "My principal luck was picking up my bag on my way back at the place the fellow fell. He had dropped it in the fall."

"Exciting thing, you see, Jack, going to the opera here. Great improvement on the common-place London pocket-picking, isn't it?"

"Well, if you'd seen the young villain come at you with his knife, I'm not quite clear you'd have thought so," laughed Richardson.

"Perhaps not," retorted Coningsby; "but then, you see, I never could run, should only have shouted 'Police!'"

"Precious deal of good there would have been in that. You'd have lost your bag."

"That may be. I should, after the manner of the country, have considered it my 'kismet.' Richardson, my boy, I am afraid you have been flying in the face of Providence, and not

losing a bag which it was pre-ordained, according to the Mussulman creed, that you should lose."

"I can only say," laughed the other, "that I shall fly in the face of Providence pretty often, when it comes to a case of annexing my goods and chattels."

"Hah," said Coningsby, with mock solemnity, "it is evidently pre-ordained that you shall die an accursed 'Giaour.' For myself, I don't despair of making a most excellent Mussulman in the end. Come along, Jack, it's getting late. Good-night."

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THEIR WAY TO "THE FRONT."

THROUGH sand and foam, through haze and mist, the good ship "Meancee" labours painfully across the vexed waters of the Black Sea, having amongst her passengers Clarke and Jack Travers, both now returned "fit for duty." They had had a beautiful start up the Bosphorus; but upon emerging into the Black Sea, the clouds began to drift, the moon became obscured, and the wind began to rise with that low, moaning, sobbing sound, that to practised ears infallibly betokens rough weather. They had been now six-and-thirty hours pitching about in that seething caldron. Twice had the tiller ropes given way; but despite wind and water they were now nearing the land-locked harbour of Balaklava, a little more and they rounded the point, and entered the narrow inlet. With "slowed engines" they crept carefully to the berth allotted to them in the crowded little bay, where ships small and great were packed like herrings in a cask.

The two friends made their way on shore, and were soon wading through the sea of mud that characterized Balaklava. What a sight it was at that time! officers in every variety of

costume foraging with an intentness and regardlessness of price, that would have filled the mothers who bore them with mingled admiration and horror. Seizing with avidity upon brandy at twelve shillings the bottle, upon butter and hams at three shillings a pound, laughingly bidding against each other to reckless amounts for geese, sheep, or turkeys. Here a man having filled his forage bags, puts a friend up to a good and newly discovered vein of pickles. There, one told of cheeses and port wine to be had on board the "Polly Jane." "'Princess Alice' in, old fellow, with no end of pickled salmon and preserved meats," whispered a third.

Meek-faced, stolid-looking Turks slowly dragged their allotted boards through the mud, evidently resigned to their "kismet," a sort of despairing feel, that Allah was great and the English quarter-master-general his prophet, at all events for the present. Grinning sailors went trotting along, each carrying his shot in the bag slung over his shoulder, and revelling in the idea of pitching it at the Great Redan or elsewhere, as soon as he got it up to the batteries. Staff-officers splashed on their big horses through the mud, almost overturning the half-starved "garçons" of the regimental officers; but then the horses, like their masters, had rather better times of it, and waxed fat and saucy after the manner of this world. Commissariat officers might be seen as near raving mad as despairing man can be driven, when he has a hungry division depending upon him for food seven miles off, with all but impracticable roads and some fifteen or so ponies and pack animals to get it thither.

Through all this chaos Coningsby and Jack made their way with the confidence of old hands. Many a greeting did they receive on their way, with congratulations on their return, for they were both well known and popular men. At last they arrived at Oppenheim's store, at that time one of the most frequented rendezvous in Balaklava. ⁶Not for what he sold, though he sold, at a price, pretty well everything; but men on all such occasions tacitly agree to assemble at some point or

another, to exchange chaff, gossip, and ideas. Very much to Mr. Oppenheim's benefit his store at that time had been selected for this purpose, and there after their day's work or foraging were done, did men congregate for a talk and a glass of something to drink, before they faced the rough tedious ride to the front. The idea of a seven miles' ride being tedious may probably cause a smile; but in the then state of the roads on a half-starved pony, it was an affair of between two and three hours—"crede experto."

One of the first to spring forward and welcome them there was young Rolls, or 'Crumbs,' as he was more generally called.

"God bless me, Jack!" he exclaimed, "how glad I am, old fellow, to see you again, and Coningsby too. It's a treat for some eyes, as they say. Coningsby I knew was all right; but as for you, Jack, when Herries packed you off, we were all a little nervous as to whether you'd pull through. However, you both look all right again now. 'Richard's hisself again' in both cases, *n'est-ce pas*. I am getting up my French fast, Jack, fraternising with our gallant allies, and generally make that observation when I'm a little heaped. How's the fin, Coningsby? Could you hold a boring four year old with it yet over a couple of miles of grass with hounds running?"

"No, Master Crumbs, nor you either with *both* hands."

"Come, I say, no disparagement of a man's horsemanship. Here somebody bring some champagne, look sharp, Oppenheim and Co.; here's two gentlemen arrived who'll settle Sebastopol and your business together."

"Shut up, Crumbs," replied Jack. "How am I and my baggage to get up to the front?"

"Oh, leave that to me. I can't fetch you to-morrow because I shall be in the Ditches; but I'll be down the next day with something for you to ride, and a pack animal to carry your traps. I suppose one will do, won't it? In the meantime, I'll see a tent's all ready for you. You'd better come and mess with Herries and me again."

"All right, Crumbs, then I shall stick to the ship to-morrow, and depend upon you the next day, eh?"

"*Certainement, Monsieur.* Now, Coningsby, have a glass of 'Oppenheim's particular.' It's very sweet, very nasty; but always reminds one of the hill at Epsom. The only consolation is nothing hurts one out here."

"Here's your health, Crumbs. How's the horse trade going on?"

"Well, I was rather unlucky the other day. Picked up a goodish pony cheap in the Naval Brigade Camp. I never ask any questions when I buy there. Confound it, he was claimed by a man in the Light Division the first time I rode him out, and I had to give in and allow it. Two sovs. and a bottle of rum clean thrown away."

"Serves you perfectly right. You didn't suppose he was honestly come by, did you?"

"Well, not exactly; but I thought he had been what we call 'found' rather further away from our lines."

"I say, Crumbs," cried a man in another regiment. "Do you know anything about the row in 'the Ditches' last night? On the French left, wasn't it? Our people had nothing to say to it, had they?"

"I wasn't down; but I think not. All in front of the Bastion de Mats, I fancy. The French have got up very close there. The Russes don't like it, and have a turn at 'em whenever they find their evenings hanging at all heavy in hand."

"Well," said another, "they needn't be at all jealous of us, we haven't advanced a yard since poor Tryon took the Rifle pits; that is on the left. I don't know what you right attack people are doing."

"Sticking pretty close to the old drill-sergeant maxim of 'as you was,'" laughed a Light Division man. "All we want to instil into Gordon is, that our trenches would be benefited by a little under draining. Wish he had farmed a bit on the Norfolk or Lincolnshire claylands."

"Ah, sloppy to sit in," quoth Coningsby. "I'm afraid you'll find that discomfiture exist till the siege is over. It is a drawback that the comfort of those employed therein cannot be more considered ; but I am afraid those engineers would always prefer digging a new ditch, to making the last dry and pleasant to reside in."

"None of your chaff," cut in Crumbs. "You cavalry swells certainly went a 'cracker' at Balaklava, and ought to have a thing to yourselves for that same, instead of a confounded clasp which will be worn by men who were eating their breakfast in Balaklava and elsewhere, while you were riding straight through the thick. But you don't know anything about 'the Ditches,' Coningsby, so let us give vent to our feelings on that subject without interfering."

"Well crowed, my cockerel," said Travers. "In the meantime, Crumbs, mind you turn up the day after to-morrow with transport for myself and baggage."

"All right, old man, you may rely upon me, bar accidents. But I must be off now. It will be pretty well dark as it is before I get back to 'our lines.' And it's deuced easy to lose your way."

"Good-bye, tell the Chief I'm here again," said Travers, "feeling very fresh. Love to Herries and all of them."

Crumbs accordingly got on his pony and rode off, while Travers and Coningsby remained smoking and listening to the various gossip that went on.

"Not heard it!" said a good-looking, heavily-bearded man of the third division. "I call it one of the best stories of the siege. It was the two gun battery next the French Piquet House, manned by the Naval Brigade fellows. They opened like the devil the other day. As you know, all our batteries are silent now, and hardly ever fire a shot. What was up?—what was the row?—nobody could think. In the meantime, bang—bang, went the battery; at last some staff dignitary thought it a thing to investigate, and went down there. He

found a sky-larking midshipman in charge, surrounded by a group of grinning sailors, who, just as he arrived, broke out into a loud hurrah.

"'He's hooking it now,' laughed one of them, as the staff-man came up.

"'What are you firing at and for what reason?' inquired he of the cocked hat.

"The midshipman, I believe, looked six ways for Sunday, as the saying goes; but one of the sailors promptly responded—

"'Well, your honour, there's a chap in there,' indicating Sebastopol, 'left his donkey-cart in the middle of the square, in the most haggeravating manner, and we've been a trying to persuade him to move on.'

"Bless'd if they hadn't blazed away some dozen or more Lancaster shell, costing six pounds or so a piece, to say nothing of the labour of getting them to the front, to make a donkey cart move."

A roar of laughter followed this anecdote, with many inquiries as to what had been the fate of the midshipman. Whether he had been recommended for promotion and a C.B., or whether, as some of the speakers expressed it, his excess of zeal had been nipped by the cold blight of officialism.

"Well, good-bye, old fellow," said Coningsby; "I'm off. Here's my old servant with the horses, and it's not much over a mile to 'our lines.' You'll come and see me whenever you come down here, won't you? I shall call in for some lunch amongst your people in a few days, for I want to have a good look at the front again."

"Always welcome, you know, to what we have. Good-bye."

For the next six-and-thirty hours, Jack was doomed to kick his heels about Balaklava, than which anything more wearying or tiresome can scarcely be conceived. A few hours in a dull country town with which one is unacquainted are trying—a couple of hours at a small station with no book are hard to bear;

but I pity sincerely the man who in those days had to lounge about that chaos of filth and speculation, called Balaklava.

"No fate so hard, but runneth to an end,"

and in due course of time, Crumbs made his appearance with the necessary transport. But that enterprising young gentleman at once announced his intention of doing a bit of foraging, as he was in Balaklava.

At the expiration of two hours, according to appointment, Travers again met the speculating forager; but Crumbs' perturbed countenance at once showed that something had gone amiss.

"Confound it, Jack!" he said. "Bless'd if they haven't stole my pony while I was shopping. It's true, I've got hold of another; but he's not half as good as my own. Besides, somebody may claim him any minute. I haven't an idea whose he is. Wait a minute while I get a pair of scissors. He's very rough, and wants trimming a bit. Won't look quite so like himself either, after I've operated on him, which will be an advantage."

Having obtained the scissors, Crumbs proceeded to dock the tail of his surreptitiously acquired steed, and finally deciding that a hogged mane would improve its appearance, also bestowed that upon him. These preparations complete, they mounted and started for the front. The 'annexed' animal carrying Travers' baggage.

They had got rather more than half way—the pack-pony being some half mile behind them in charge of a soldier-servant—when they were overtaken by an artillery officer, evidently in a wrathful frame of mind.

"Which of you gentlemen," he exclaimed, "is Mr. Rolls of the —th?"

"I am," said Crumbs. "What's the matter?"

"Your servant behind, sir, is in possession of a pony of mine

which I must trouble you instantly to restore. It was stolen from me in Balaklava about an hour ago."

"I don't know about that," said Crumbs. "I know I lost one there about that time ; another came into the yard, my servant caught him, and I am using him now to get my friend's traps here up to the front."

"I can't help that !" replied the irritated claimant. "I can swear to my pony, and will trouble you to hand him over at once."

"Well, if you say it's yours, I can't swear the contrary," said Crumbs. "We'll come back and see about it."

There was nothing for it but to ride back, yield the claimed pony, and transfer the baggage to the back of the one Crumbs was riding.

"But you've cut his mane and tail, sir," said the artillery man, still wrathful, while the saddles were being changed.

"Well," replied Crumbs, "I'm sure it wasn't before they wanted it. How could I tell he was yours?"

"You must have known very well that he wasn't your property, anyway. In England, I should think they would consider felony the most appropriate term, and the consequences thereof the most appropriate reward for your labours."

"Well, I am very sorry ; but, you see, we look upon these things in a milder light out here. I was in difficulties for a pony, having had my own stolen. I found a stray one, and used him after the manner of the Army generally, and the sailors in particular."

Spite of his irritation, the artillery man could hardly help laughing at Rolls's consummate impudence.

"Well, Mr. Rolls," he said, "I'll trouble you to keep your hands off all stock of mine in future," and he rode away triumphantly with the retrieved pony.

"Nothing for it, Jack, but to ride turn and turn about for the rest of it ; luckily we've got the longest and worst half the road done."

An hour's hard trudging, or thereabouts, brought them to the lines of the —th, and many were the congratulations and hearty shakes of the hand with which Jack's old comrades welcomed him back. Roll's misadventure with the pony was received with roars of laughter.

"He's always at it," said Herries, "and if they hung for horse-stealing out here, as they did in olden times in England, his life wouldn't be worth two days' purchase. Luckily for him, there seems to be an acknowledged laxity on that point at present, so we may be spared an early parade to witness his premature departure from this world. By the way, an old friend of yours called on me a week ago, to inquire after your whereabouts and health generally, I mean Langton. He is doing reporter to something or other here."

"Where is he?" inquired Jack.

"He's left a few lines for you, which I have got in my tent, also another letter. Begged me to tell you to inquire for him at Head-Quarters, where he has got a tent or hut, or something that he considers his 'home.' What a nice fellow he seems. I 'liquored him up,' and sent him on his way, I can't say rejoicing, for he seemed anxious about you; as to say the truth, old fellow, we all were."

"Thanks no end; but I think I shall do now. I'm going to mess with you and Crumbs, as formerly. The 'young un' has been actively engaged foraging to-day."

"Yes, nothing pleases him more, bar a felonious trade in ponies. We gave a big dinner about a week ago, had three fellows to dine with us, Crumbs in his glory. He had got a goose somehow; I am always afraid to ask how, when I find we are suddenly the possessors of such luxuries. Crumbs spent his day in what we call the kitchen, engaged in the manufacture of a highly superior 'plum duff;' the sauce, for which he ransacked our whole store of drinkables, would, he informed me, be something startling. Perhaps it was; but as our soldier-servant sent it up all over the roast goose instead of the pud-

ding, the effect was rather marred ; it seems Crumbs forgot to inform him what this elaborate sauce was to be used with—hence this deplorable error ; however, we ate the goose with the sauce, and the pudding without it,

“ ‘ Good digestion waits on appetite ’ ”

out here. With the exception of Crumbs’ wrath at the *contre-temps*, the dinner was a decided success.”

By this, they had arrived at Herries’ tent.

“ Here are your letters, Jack,” he observed, taking them from a bullock trunk. “ That’s what Langton wrote here ; the other’s the letter he left for you. I shall do a pipe while you read them ; my appetite is more to be depended upon than the dinner in these parts, so that I am never afraid of taking the rough edge off. It’s Crumbs’ receipt, in short, when we have a guest and a shady banquet. Put dinner back half-an-hour, give him a pipe of Cavendish, and two or three glasses of Crimean sherry, and depend upon it his dinner will be a matter of great indifference to him.”

Jack tore open Langton’s note first ; in the other, he at once recognised Breezie’s somewhat masculine hand.

“ DEAR TRAVERS,

“ I leave a few lines for you with your friend, Captain Herries, who welcomed me the other day on your account with Arab or Crimean hospitality—insisting upon my not only trying the commissariat rum of the division, but also some extremely curious and pernicious caraçoa, lately obtained in Balaklava. How correspondents’ brains bear up against these insidious attacks is miraculous. I am rather anxious about you ; Herries don’t speak well of your departure, and says he shall be very glad to hear you are all right again ; to that I need scarcely say ditto, and the most satisfactory proof you can give me, will be to come to ‘ my diggings,’ and let me look at you. I have a letter for you from Breezie. She says she

has also written to Scutari, and I need scarcely add, is in a sad way to know how you are ; I trust, though, you have written to her. Hoping most sincerely that your shadow may darken my doorway very shortly.

"Believe me, ever yours,

"CIS LANGTON."

It is almost needless to say after this, that Jack and Langton had already met several times in Bulgaria, and that the latter was perfectly aware of the footing upon which Jack and Breezie stood. The engagement met his decided approval. He liked Jack, and admired and recognised his thoroughly honest and chivalrous nature. He knew, moreover, how far Breezie's heart was committed in the matter ; and now that she had confided her whole history to her lover, and that lover cared nothing for the scandal, he felt there was every probability of happiness for the girl whom he loved as sincerely as if she really had been his daughter.

What shall I say about Breezie's letter—do you want me to tell you? Can you not picture to yourself what a warm-hearted, loving English girl might write to her lover in those days? There were plenty such letters in the mail bags at that time, with more poetry and pathos in them than is given to the poetical pens of this day generally. De Quincy says, somewhere, if you want to read the purest English, 'stop the mail,' break open all the letters in women's handwriting, and in three-fourths of them you will obtain it. Whether he is right or not I can't say, but I fancy if you could have seized the women's letters in a Crimean mail, you might have found poetry and pathos enough.

Well, I suppose it will be so till the end of all things.

"Men must work, and women must weep."

The bearded moustached lords of creation read these letters over their short pipes and ration rum, and with a mendacious

apology for their shortcomings under the head of 'duty,' scrawled a few hurried lines in reply, and then went out dog-hunting.

"Tell you who I hear is out in these parts," said Herries, as he and Jack sat smoking their pipes, preparatory to turning in, "that's Delpré; he's a captain in that refuge for the broken and distressed, the Bashi Bazouk Contingent. Did you meet him while you were away?"

"No, but I heard of him. He has a troop in it, and I fancy is down Eupatoria way. As a rule, I think those fellows live more at Constantinople than anywhere else. There, clad in shining raiment, they drink confusion to the enemy; and if absorption of champagne shakes Sebastopol, they are certainly doing us 'yeoman's service.'"

"Ham," grunted Herries, as pipe in mouth, he rolled between his blankets, "Good-night."

"Good-night!" responded Jack, who of course sat up another ten minutes or so to read Breezie's letter again, by the flickering light of the candle that the porter bottle held. A half-groan, half-sigh, enough to have disturbed a delicate sleeper, and he too sought his pillow. When you live for months within sound of the batteries, it takes something pretty serious to interfere with your night's rest. I fear Jack's sentiment, too, disappeared with that solitary groan and his last gulp of rum and water.

"The devil's own day, your honor," quoth Mr. O'Flannigan, Herries' servant, the next morning. "It's not quite made up its mind whether it will snow or rain, so it's thrying a taste of both. Snowing for choice, though your honor's for nothing, Lord be praised, to-day, in the way of duty, and faith if you'll take my advice, ye'll stick to the blankets, and Mister Thravers there too. *Will you wash or take tay?*"

"No chance of both," said Herries.

"Faith, your honor, with the snow on thê ground it's the devil's own lottery finding a root. Jem Bales, the batman, and

myself was out the whole of yesterday afternoon, and taking off what we must have to cook the dinner with, there's only about enough to boil one kettle."

"What do you say, Jack?" cried Herries. "I'm all for tea. Washing we'll do the first chance. In the meantime, tea and something to eat. I don't leave this till wanted, while the weather stands as it is."

Readers may laugh at the idea of two healthy men electing to take their day 'out' in beds; but any Crimean man who *did* the winter campaign, will bear me out with the probable addenda of "deuced lucky to have the chance."

"You don't believe much in the day?" remarked Jack.

"No," replied Herries, "for the next twelve hours I shall pin my faith on tobacco and blankets. We'll get up about four, trudge round and see our fellow-sufferers, have a chaff, no news ever going such weather as this. Come back, eat, if we have got anything to eat, smoke, and turn in again. Such is life in your winter campaigns—more amusing to read about than to go through. We shall both be for the Ditches at four a.m. to-morrow morning, and there never was a grander day for hedging one's sleep. If you've brought anything amusing to read up from Constantinople, chuck it over; if not I'll take a spell at 'Eliä,' and go to sleep again."

"I say, you fellows, this is pleasant, isn't it?" cried Crumbs, thrusting his head into the tent. "Blessed if the whole corps ain't in bed. I'll be hung if I believe there's a soul up except the guard, sergeant-major, and myself, and what to do I don't know. I'm coming down with you to-morrow morning, Herries. What time shall we dine? Make it early, there's a good fellow. Will half-past five do?"

"All right, that will do perfectly. Only hope there will be some food then."

"Bless you, yes, I'm going to spend the afternoon in the hole we call our kitchen, smoking pipes and skimming soup. I'll give you some devilled sardines, too. If O'Flannigan has only

been careful with the fuel, I shall cook two or three to try this afternoon. Let you fellows know the result about three, only mind, in the present hard times, you must wait till dinner to practically test it. How nice you look, Jack. Jolly place to pass a winter in, ain't it, my chick?"

"Get out, you young scamp," roared Herries.

"Be calm," responded Crumbs. "I shall call the whole camp if it clears. Till then or dinner-time, bless you."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A QUIET DAY IN "THE DITCHES."

THROUGH the misty morning murk rose the hoarse cry of, "get dressed the covering party." Obedient to the summons, shortly issued from the various tents dark shadowy forms, who rapidly made their way through the snow to the parade ground. Herries, Jack Travers, Crumbs, and two or three more of their brother officers speedily found themselves trudging along the ravine that led to the left attack, with orders to relieve the guards on the right of the second parallel, and those in the advanced trench.

Silence and darkness so far enveloped the English trenches; but the Russians were treating the French on the left to a grand pyrotechnical display in the shape of shells and rockets; the deep boom of the big guns being heard in rapid succession, varied by the faint sharp whizz of the rockets. Crimean men's ears at that time were not particularly startled by such sounds. It was only when they heard the quick rolling rattle of musketry that they fancied things were getting serious. That was generally a pretty sure indication of an attack from one side or the other, though occasionally induced by a false alarm.

Stumbling along through the snow and the darkness, in com-

mand of fifty men, and accompanied by Crumbs, Jack Travers found himself in the advanced trench just as the first faint grey streak of dawn began to glimmer in the East. It was held by day at that time by merely a small party. As yet there were no guns there, though it was destined to have heavy artillery in it shortly.

The sun rose bright and clear after yesterday's downfall, gleaming over the city, which as yet, to the naked eye, showed but few symptoms of the bombardment of October. Travers stood looking at it with all the curiosity of one who had been for some time away. He was nearer to the town, perhaps, than he had as yet been, as he had been invalided to Scutari soon after the battle of Inkermann, and at that time the ground upon which he now stood had been occupied by the Russians as rifle pits. Now he was overlooking the town, which lay like a panorama below him. You could see people moving about, make out all the principal buildings, hazard conjectures as to what they were, trace the faint line of mast tops that marked the submerged fleet across the harbour entrance. Fort Constantine with its pocked-marked face, memento of the naval attack, Fort Paul, Fort Nicholas, shone out cold and white in the February sun. Boats were busy flitting about the harbour. Except for the occasional distant puff of smoke and faint report of some sharp-shooter's rifle, you could hardly believe one of the most tremendous duels of modern days was then being fought *à l'outrance*. The angry cannonade of some two hours ago had wholly ceased. It seemed as if both sides were weary of the night's passion, and would fain breakfast in peace. The Sebastopol clocks musically chimed out eight.

The sound woke Crumbs from a reverie into which he had fallen.

"Hurrah," he said, "that's feeding time. We may begin to look out for breakfast now; I told our servants to be down sharp at eight. Tell you what, old fellow, if you keep staring over that parapet any longer, you'll find your attention play-

fully reciprocated. It ain't, as they say, altogether safe in broad daylight for too long at a time."

Almost as Crumbs finished speaking, the faint ping of a rifle-ball showed Jack that he had at length attracted the attention of some distant rifle pit.

"I fancy you're right," he observed; "but we don't get many men hit here, do we?"

"No, but it's not much of a parapet in some places, and of course the Russian riflemen are always on the look out for a shot, if it's only to pass the time."

At this juncture the breakfast arrived, and when men have been up since five, that practically beats any view in the world. Seated on a couple of stones with their backs to the parapet; the two were speedily absorbed in the demolition of the contents of a field canteen.

"Now, Jack, look here! Here's something extra luxurious to top up with—some potted beef I picked up at a sale the other day. A box sent to some poor fellow who had gone away sick. They put it all up to auction, and I bought this—paid a lot of money for it too. But I go on 'Major Dalgetty's' principle, Lay in food whenever you have a chance. Can't campaign a yard without it, you know, though some of our poor fellows have had to try a good bit lately."

"Capital, you young gourmand. You're wasting your substance in pampering your unholy appetite."

"Come, I say, don't eat it if you are so anxious about my substance."

"Must; wish I could eat it all to punish your gluttony."

"Like your cheek!" grinned Crumbs. "I'll keep my potted beef to myself next time."

"Quite right. Don't lead me again into becoming a partner in your enormities," retorted the imperturbable Jack.

With this little friendly spar, the breakfast and the potted beef came to a conclusion, and the pair were left to get through as best they might, a long wearisome day in the trenches. The days

were far more tedious than the nights. In the latter, the necessity for vigilance kept you alive. In the day the greater part of the guard slept if they could. In the night you could move about freely. In the day, in the advance, at all events, the Russian riflemen restricted your movements considerably.

"Run chaps those sailors are," said Crumbs. "Last October I was down in the first parallel one warm day just before we opened fire, there were some half-dozen or more of them laughing like fun not far from me, so I went up just to see what the chaff was. One of them had caught a little green lizard, and I'll be hung if these great hairy fellows hadn't formed themselves into a court-martial, like so many schoolboys, to try it as a Russian spy. They went through all the forms, eventually erecting a miniature gibbet, and hanging it with the greatest gravity."

"The talk of our fellows is amusing enough sometimes," smiled Jack. "Let's draw up there to the right, and listen to what that knot are talking about."

Lighting their pipes, they accordingly shifted their position, and sat down within ear shot of a group of their own men, who were killing the time by consumption of tobacco and lively converse.

The principal talker, and evidently licensed jester of the party, was a tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed grenadier, some six feet one in height and of athletic build. A fine specimen of muscular development with a devil-may-care cast of countenance, an eye that sparkled with fun, but the face spoilt by a strong animal expression.

For a second or two the men stopped talking and glanced at their officers, but finding the latter had sat quietly down, soon continued their previous conversation.

"Yes," said the soldier above mentioned, "it's been hard times this winter, and no mistake; but we must be getting near fine weather now, though this here snow don't look like it. Still, though the cold's bad enough, I can stand anything but

that d—d wet. It gets into one's bones so—kind of cross between cholera and ague, and not much to take either for or against it. Now you chaps, I tell you what stood to me more, and does still, than anything else all these times—that's chewing tobacco. It warms you, blunts the hunger, and keeps you going. Smoking ain't no manner of use alongside it. I ain't going to deny but what rum's a good thing if one could only get enough of it; but these commissariat chaps are all abroad. I've been thinking," he continued, "of going to see the General about that rum question for some time."

A broad grin convulsed his audience. Even Jack Travers could scarcely keep from laughing. The speaker was a notorious offender on the subject of 'drink,' and everybody knew in what light he viewed getting enough of it.

"Well, John," observed another of the party, "you can tell us all about the General when you've seen him. Tell us another story. What do you call your hardest times out here? and what did you do when they came?"

"Well, about my hardest times, I reckon, was the beginning of last month. The salt junk was that scarce and that hard that day, blowed if I don't think the Commissariat had put us on *piece work*, same like the Engineers do on a working party, only perhaps the Commissariat's job was the toughest of the two. The ration might be small, but I'm blessed if there wasn't as much chewing as would last three good dinners at English rations. From some wrong ideas of the Colonel about that time, I was under half stoppages of rum."

Here he and his audience grinned.

"Well, I'd no money, and, what's worse, no tobacco; and my chum, Bill Riley, he was in the same quandary.

"'What's to be done, Bill?' said I. 'No, nothing else I can stand, but baccy I must have.'

"'Don't know, John,' said he. 'I should like a bit of baccy, awful; but as I don't know where to get none, I shall take it out in sleep.'

" 'I'm off on the cadge,' says I. 'Don't you believe in me any more if I comes home without something to chew.'

"Well, up I goes to the fourth division to beg, borrow, or 'happen on' laccy. There I sees an old Turk a selling it at sixpence a stick. Not a deal of good to me, you'll think, who had no money. Wait a minute. There was a Frenchman there who had just bought five sticks, a Zouave—one of the right sort, and spoke a little English. I asked him to lend me three sticks, and told him my game. Well, he did, so I stands close by the old Turk with the three sticks in my hand for a few minutes. At last I said—

" 'Now, then, Johnny, where's my change ?'

" 'No change, Johnny,' said he, 'you no buy !'

" 'You d—d old thief,' said I, 'haven't I just bought these three sticks, and given you half a crown ? Give me my change, or I'll knock your wretched old head off.'

"He looked rather staggered at this ; but the Zouave backed me up, and I 'spect I looked a good deal like doing it. So at last he handed over a shilling.

" 'Now, give me two sticks of baccy,' said I ; but he'd have nothing more to say to me, so I was forced to get the Frenchman to go and buy 'em for me, and as he stole a couple more on his own account while he was doing it, the Turk didn't make a good day of it altogether."

The same hero subsequently related how he had raised supplies upon another occasion, by disposing of his boots to a Turk for five shillings. On receiving payment, he concluded the transaction by knocking the unhappy buyer down, recovered his boots, and bolted ; buying part of a soldier's kit, leading, if discovered, to a short but stirring interview with the Provost-Marshal, the purchaser knew better than to seek redress.

But enough of trench stories. There is perhaps but little humour in them, though these two are genuine enough. Still, in those wearisome hours, in that early spring, or for the matter of that in the hot summer days that were to follow, a little wit

went a wondrous way. The tobacco fraud was artistic. In another sphere, the perpetrator might have made his fortune as a bank director, &c. As a soldier, in spite of many great points, I fancy he turned out a failure. His theory of what constituted 'rum enough,' leading him to unmitigated irredeemable grief.

Oh, dear ! will anything take place ? Will they shoot, I don't mean *particularly* at us ; but at somebody ? Something to throw a little life into this tedious watching and waiting. Do you recollect those lines of Browning's in "the Glove ?"

"Heigho, yawned one day King Francis,
Distance all value enhances,
Here we've got peace, and aghast, I'm
Caught thinking war the true pastime."

Something of that sort ran through Travers' head, as the weary day dragged on. It was no bravado—simply the feeling that anything would be a relief from the present monotony. Moderate danger was preferable to being bored.

Slowly the cold bright March day wears away. Now and again comes a sullen shot from the beleaguered city, while the occasional faint crack of a rifle betokens that some sharpshooter can stand the monotony no longer, or that something has offered a mark too tempting to be resisted.

On the left of the allied attack alone, is there much sign of vitality. Here, the French and Russians ever and again break out into a sharp angry sputtering of musketry for some ten minutes or so. They are too close to be peaceable neighbours for many minutes together, and are jealous of the slightest encroachment. The small piece of debateable ground between them is as dangerous to tread upon as Tom Tidler's. Placing foot on, or even looking at it, is fiercely resented. They are jealous as two keen sportsmen shooting on their boundary fence, with a licence to kill their neighbour's keepers as well as pheasants, and the penalties of the law of trespass at their own discretion. That little piece of debateable ground is destined to be carpeted thick with corpses before three weeks are over. A

few nights more, and a French column will reel back broken and blood-stained, leaving its leader and half its number behind it. A disaster which elicits from the iron French commander, the brief stern order, "The army will attack nightly till the position is carried. General —— will lead the assault to-night." The second time the French succeed, though the Russians fought long and doggedly for Tom Tidler's ground.

Rolls and Travers have crawled down to have a look at that queer-looking cave, called 'the Ovens,' in which, when the trench they now occupy was but a line of unconnected rifle-pits, the Russian sharp-shooters, who then occupied them, had been accustomed to cook their dinners. They have smoked till they feel equal to no more pipes, exhausted every resource they can think of for killing time, and are now sitting silent and dejected, wishing the tedious day was over.

Four o'clock comes at last. The usual spattering fire of sharp-shooters is beginning. Men and officers anxiously consult both watches and sun. Ears are pricked to listen for the Sebastopol climes. A round shot comes clipping the parapet, and goes skipping along in the direction of the second parallel.

"That looks well," said Crumbs. "Sure sign it's getting about relief time, when they think it worth while to pitch a shot or two our way. They won't be long now."

That last half hour waiting for the relief, was generally as tedious as that much abused quarter of an hour before dinner. However,

"Time and the hour run through the roughest day,"

and with great satisfaction Travers and Crumbs eventually hailed their substitutes, and prepared to tramp back to camp. Some three or four round shot came spinning over them; but they hurt no one, as they seldom did at that time. The Russians, I presume, rather blazing on the old sporting maxim, "you can't kill if you don't fire," than with any definite object.

"Very decent dinner to-day, Jack," said the irrepressible Crumbs, "so look sharp and get ready."

You may laugh at the stress laid on eating and drinking in this Crimean life, but eating and drinking are most important events in campaigning. It is rather a sensual life after all, and is apt to bring forward prominently the innate selfishness of our natures. It is wonderful, too, how interest in dinner increases with an uncertainty regarding it.

"Halloa ! mail in from England," said Herries, as he and Jack entered their joint tent, and he pointed to a small packet of papers and letters that lay on the table.

Jack pounced upon one which he recognised as in Breezie's handwriting, and was soon absorbed in the contents. Love letters are sacred things and one has no business to meddle with them ; but for the furtherance of this story, we must peep over Jack's shoulder upon this occasion.

" DEAREST JACK,

" I am so anxious on your account, that I sent a few lines, under cover to papa, to the Crimea for you, besides writing to Scutari. I think you must have been very ill when you could not write to me, and in the few staggering lines that I got the other day, I am afraid you made light of it for fear of frightening me. Ah, Jack, the old Jeanette and Jeannot song often rises in my mind. You are having shocking times and dreadful hardships out there, my dearest ; but us poor women at home are having very little better.

" You don't know what this weary watching and waiting is. I am not given to be nervous ; but I cannot help a slight shiver at every mail. If I don't hear from you and papa it's agony, and I'm half afraid of my letters when I do get them. You are very good about writing, pray continue so if it is ever such a scrap. I sit down to my water-colours ; but it is stupid work now. There is no one to laugh at me when the trees won't come right, and refractory cows show a decided want of foreshortening. I got two guineas for one though last week—what do you

say to that, sir? Do you not feel ashamed that you ever dared to laugh at my trees?

"I went to spend a fortnight with my aunts down at Hitchin the other day; but I had no spirits to tease them as in former days, and they had it all their own way, doing as they liked with me. They bothered me so to know what was the matter with me, that I was at last fain to confess,

" 'My love was a soldier, and to the wars gone.'

Then they petted me dreadfully, and almost insisted on putting me to bed and feeding me on jellies and beef tea. Don't laugh, Jack, they were very good about it.

"How I wish I could come out to be somewhere near you. I daresay hundreds of women feel the same; but both you and papa say it is impossible, so I suppose it is, but it is such lonely work for me living here by myself. I went to see Belle Bartley the other day. She is very kind to me whenever she is in town. I told her of our engagement. You know you told me to make no secret of it to any one. She spoke so nicely about it, praised you, sir, and said she was sure we should be happy. Perhaps we might if you could but come back. Don't think me very foolish, I know you can't now, and will wait as patiently as I can till you do. Good-bye, dearest.

"Believe me ever,

"Your own,

"BREEZIE."

"P.S. Such news, and oh, so kind of Laura Lyttlereck to come down with the paper to show me. You are a captain, Jack. I do hope what Laura says is probable, will come to pass, and that I shall be the first to tell you.

"Lots of kisses 'on promotion' to *Captain* Travers from his own Breezie."

"By Jove, Jack!" cried Crumbs. "You're in the Gazette, they tell me, some of the fellows who have seen the papers. I

congratulate you, old fellow. We ought to have some champagne and drink your health to-night ; but you see we ain't got none. Never mind, we'll do it in rum and water now, and do it again in champagne the first opportunity."

The tramp of a horse is heard outside, and a voice inquiring for Captain Herries' tent. The similarity renders it difficult to distinguish one tent from another, unless you know the camp intimately.

"Langton's voice, by Jove!" said Jack, springing to his feet, and going to the door. "Here you are, just in time ; come in and feed."

"Ah, Travers, the very man I came to look after. Somebody told me to-day you were back again, and all right ; is that so? I need hardly ask, or you would not be here."

"Yes," replied Jack, "I am all sound again now, and just come out of the trenches ; but get off and come in. Here, one of you men, come and take this horse."

"Can't, indeed, I must get home and do a deal of scribbling to-night. I was up in the Fourth Division, and thought I would ride round your way, just to ask after you. Did you get my note?"

"Yes, thanks, and Breezie's. I am coming down to lunch with you to-morrow, and have a talk, that is if you are likely to be in."

"Sure to find me in from twelve till two, unless something quite unexpected turns up. Of course you have seen the Gazette ; I congratulate you."

"Yes, I heard it first though in a letter from Breezie ; but do get off and come in, and take your chance of what's going."

"Can't, indeed, thank you. I'll drink your health here if you'll give me anything to do it in. How do, Herries, glad to see you've got your chum here back again. I can't tell much how he looks in this faint moonlight ; but he talks as if he were all right again."

"Yes, I think he'll do now. Sorry you can't stay and have some of such dinner as there is."

"So am I; but I've lots to do to-night. Ah, that will do; here's your health, and may the brevet majority soon follow," and, without question, Langton tossed off some compound Jack handed him. "There now," he continued, "get along in and astonish the dinner. After a day's trenches, no doubt you are all ready for it. Shall expect you to lunch about one to-morrow. Good-night; good-night, Herries;" and Langton disappeared through the faint moonlight.

Dinner and a quiet talk over their pipes. The vivacious Crumbs voted his companions uncommonly slow, and rose to seek more congenial and festive spirits, remarking—

"Well, Jack, if accession of rank is not a more exhilarating affair than it seems to be in your case, I hope I shall never be a captain. You're both shocking bad company this evening, so I shall wish you good-night; shouldn't wonder if there's a little loo going on in Johnson's tent."

Herries and Jack continued to smoke and talk for more than an hour, and then rolled into their respective blankets.

"Good-night, old fellow," said Herries. "Thank Heaven, we're not wanted at half-past five to-morrow morning; we've done our day in the Ditches."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LYTTLERECKS AT HOME—A CRIMEAN LETTER.

"WHAT will they say in England?" was the title of a popular song of those days, written just after the victory of the Alma. No doubt this idea predominated very strongly through the ranks of the army whenever they did *do anything*; but as, at the time of which I am writing, they were doing virtually *nothing*, instead of speculating upon "what they said," suppose

we go back a little with our story, and see what they had been doing in England during the last few months?

Since the time Jack Travers sailed from Plymouth, till we again met him at Misseri's hotel in Constantinople, an interval of nine months had elapsed. The regiment had sailed for the East in April, and it was in January we once more encountered him on the banks of the Bosphorus. I love to be particular about my dates. They give a general dove-tailing to a story, like a train of good circumstantial evidence, and though, reader, you may make the mistake of supposing all this narrative to be fictitious, take my word for it, that if it did not all happen as I have chronicled, something very like it did.

We left Delpré, of whom we have heard but flying rumours of late, "in grievous case," on the steeple-chase course at Harrow, if you remember, a broken arm and an unascertained number of ribs also injured, though two or so were the conjectured amount. The Nemesis that there overtook him, one can scarcely deny was a righteous one. Punishment does not always follow quickly on offending, and though for many years he had gone through the agony endured by those "who live by bills," it was the first time physical suffering had befallen him.

He had taken the wrong turn almost at the outset of life, and, though of course morally, he had been "gone to the bad" for many years; yet his nerve, talent, and thorough unscrupulousness had enabled him to keep a fair appearance before the world. Now, both character and caste were fast slipping from him; he was already looked upon as one of those only to be spoken to upon a race-course. Society, in short, was at last recognising him in his true character, that of "a leg."

I read in an American humourist the other day, who, by the way, would be far better worth reading, if he did not distort the humour Nature has given him, by seeking to make himself more funny by absurdities in spelling:

"There is one advantage in going to the devil—the road is easy, and you are sure to get there."

Delpré had travelled that highway much slower than most men. Not from any moral scruples on the point; but his clear head was always keenly conscious of the advantage of keeping position and a certain amount of character as long as practicable. He was quite aware that that was all over now, and though it may seem a paradox, felt acutely the humiliation of his present position. It is a very simple and an every day case. Utterly callous as regarded conscience, laughing all moral scruples to scorn, yet he suffered bitterly at being "found out." He was carried, after his accident, to an inn at Harrow, where he remained some few days ere the doctor would sanction his removal to London. Once back at his old rooms, he lay fretting on a sick-bed for some weeks; the arm was of course soon in a sling, and in a fair way to come right, but the ribs turned out a more serious business, and the doctors feared some internal injury as yet beyond their ken. But gambler, libertine, as he had been all his life, he had always been moderately abstemious in his living, and that conjoined with a naturally good constitution, pulled him through.

Still his reflections were none of the pleasantest. None came to see him during that weary convalescence, but his "leg friends," Messrs. Hart, Davidson, and Co. The former even grumbled at his uselessness, utterly ignoring the fact that but for Delpré's desperate expedient, he never could have won the race at Harrow. Whilst, as for the latter scoundrel, he simply preached cold comfort, grinning:

"It's a devilish lucky thing, Del, as it's turned out. That fellow, Plum, swore if you could have been brought there, he'd have had you up before the stewards for foul riding, and showed the whole thing up. It was a master-stroke of yours thinking of it, and you did it beautifully; but if you hadn't been so badly broke, there would have been a deuce of a row to top up with. As for old Hart, though he sacked a pile of dibs

over it, he ain't a bit grateful, but merely looks upon it as money out of his pocket; you ain't well enough to do it again."

Debts and duns, too, were pouring in; for Delpré's liabilities to tradesmen were very heavy, and he felt that arrest was imminent. If it once took place, he knew that "the detainers" that would be lodged, would make release hopeless. Since the fiasco he had made by burning the will, his sisters had steadily declined all communication with him, as might be expected. True, they could not bring it home to him, but they had made up their minds, which, as the Countess had no idea of prosecuting, was enough for their purpose. Hart would certainly not come to his assistance unless he were well enough to be useful, and even then was hardly likely to pay the price.

Far advanced towards recovery, he was moodily skimming the papers one morning, when he read an account of the formation of the Bashi Bazooks under Beatson.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I'll go—there's a chance—I'll make a clean bolt of it. I'll go down to the Horse Guards this minute, and see what they'll do for me."

Delpré was a man of decision. He was at the Horse Guards in less than half-an-hour. He was of the very stamp they wanted for that service. A man of long service, with many years' Eastern experience; unscrupulous, and a steeple-chase rider. He came away with the promise of a troop, and a recommendation to be all ready to start in a week or so.

"The sooner the better," thought he. "Now to put the double on everybody."

His preparations for departure were quickly and quietly made. To Hart and Davidson, he merely made out that he was making no progress towards recovery. A couple of bullock trunks, in the meantime, containing all necessaries for the campaign, were "waiting till called for" in the cloak room at the Waterloo Station. At the end of eight days he received a big official letter, with the mystic O. H. M. S. on the cover. It contained

the desired commission, and a passage for Constantinople. Telling his landlady he should not dine at home, Delpré walked quietly out of the house, hailed the nearest cab, and started for the East.

Furious were the revilings, and savage the denunciations of Mr. Hart, when he found Delpré had slipped through his fingers. Piteous were his lamentations as to how he had been robbed and swindled out of eleven hundred pounds, by trusting in a gentleman's honour. As if in the whole course of his existence, Mr. Hart would have trusted to that or anything else, not substantiated by stamped paper—as if he had not bought Delpré at that price, and fairly had his money's worth out of him. It's true he meant to have a great deal more; but commend me to a "Hebrew leg" who gets worsted, if you want to hear lamentation over unsuccessful rascality. Davidson only chuckled; he bore no good will to Delpré, and was too fast in Hart's clutches himself ever to dream of escape, even had he wished it—what else could he do? Burglary he hadn't pluck for; nor for thimble rig, talent; a hell keeper's bonnet and race-course tout was about all that he was now fitted for.

But let us turn from these dregs of humanity to something more pleasant.

That Tom Lyttlereck and Laura were married, Breezie's letter has already informed us. They were now comfortably established in a small house down Pimlico way. Tom was getting very fair work in the literary way; as has been said, "by no means a bad walking stick, though it hardly does as a crutch." Pimlico, in those days—mind, I am speaking of fourteen years ago—had not then grown to its present imposing dimensions. Down Pimlico way now-a-days, might mean anything; at that time it meant a little the other side Eaton Square. Though small, Laura's was a pretty drawing-room, tastefully furnished. Full of all those feminine surroundings, which a true woman of taste and intellect loves to gather about herself. There was nothing gorgeous, but there was harmony of colour. The

lounging chairs and *fautcuils* were cosy places made to lounge and chat in, and not gilt straight-backed abominations made only to look at. Flowers in the window, flowers in the vases, books littered about as if read, and not merely laid out ; an open piano and scattered music. The acquaintances of the newly married couple voted Laura's drawing-room a charming place for a gossip, and the *piquante*, sunshiny hostess, perfection.

Laura had just come in from walking, and was flitting about her domain with her bonnet still on, waiting the return of her lord and master. Now looking at her flowers, now trying a snatch of an air at the piano. I have called it flitting about, though perhaps had anyone been in the room who wished to read or write, they might have snappishly designated it as "fidgeting about." If truth must be told, Laura was in a slight state of impatience about her husband's return. What did she expect, news from the Crimea? Not at all, but she did want to know whether he had got those stalls for the Olympic for Monday next. Her sister was coming to stay with her, and she had set her heart upon their going to see Robson.

A sharp knock at the door, and Tom entered.

"Well, Tom, did you get them?"

"Get what?"

"Now don't be teasing; the stalls, of course, for Monday."

"Oh, yes, I've got them; but you put 'did I get them' with such alarming energy, that I was afraid I had been guilty of some awful case of omission and oblivion. But look here, is there anything for dinner?"

"Of course there is; but why do you ask the question?"

"No, but, Laura, is there an elaborate table to be spread to-night?"

"No, if you wanted an extensive dinner why didn't you tell me?"

"Oh, well I have asked about six people to dine. Send out

at once for another loaf and a couple of pounds of cheese. They must be fed, you know."

"Oh, Tom!" laughed Laura, "I know you too well. Six people, indeed; but you have asked some one, who is it? any one I know?"

"Yes, my little wife—Charlie Repton. We needn't trouble our heads much about him, besides, I told him you hadn't the remotest idea of house-keeping. He said he could easily fancy it, beyond a general idea that there always ought to be champagne and ices."

"You audacious libeller; and if I thought Charlie had really been so impertinent as to say so, you should have nothing but bread and cheese to-night. What did the Magazine say to the story?"

"They are going to look it over, and I think will take it; but I shan't get quite so much as I had hoped for it. So be very careful of your bonnets please, at present, and only venture out when the barometer's high."

"Certainly, sir; your commands shall be attended to. I'm so glad Charlie's coming. I haven't seen him since our wedding day, I think. Do you want dinner put back at all?"

"No. Now run away and dress, or else you'll be too late. Not that the bread and cheese will spoil much, I suppose."

"How dare you laugh at my house-keeping? Look at the symbols of my authority;" and snatching up a small basket containing some keys, she shook it merrily in her husband's face, and tripped out of the room.

Charlie Repton arrived in a Hansom at a fair approximation to punctuality for him: he being a notorious offender in that respect, one of those whose invitations to dinner ought always to have been headed with Brillat-Savarin's aphorism, to wit that: "To wait too long for a tardy guest is a want of regard for all those who are present." A maxim which might be beneficially acted on a great deal oftener than it usually is.

"How do-do, Charlie?" said Laura. "I'm not much given

to find fault with men on the score of calling ; but really when we have given you some dinner, I do think I am entitled to talk severely to you."

"Well, you know," said Charlie, after he had shaken hands, "you haven't after all been established here so very long, and I have been but little in town lately. Then you are a little out of the way."

"Just what I tell her," said Tom ; "but she still clings to the idea that she's a swell, and has her name in the Court Guide."

Dinner is over. Tom, his wife, and Charlie Repton are gathered lazily round the fire in the drawing-room. Though it is the end of April, a fire is still pleasant, as for my part till you can sit out of doors I think it always is. "And so, Laura, you have settled down quite into a domestic character, and forsworn dancing, flirting, and all such vanities," said Charlie, balancing his tea-cup.

"Don't believe her," cried Tom. "I think she's as bad as before I married her, and danced at the Gregorys' till four the other morning. I thought she never would be ready to come home. Her flirting, of course, she has the decency to conceal from me as much as possible. At present, my only consolation is, it seems, pretty general."

The laughing glance exchanged between husband and wife showed that, at all events, the latter's flirting gave Tom very little uneasiness.

"That's just like him, Charlie, why I had to wait patiently because he was engaged to Miss somebody or another—I forget her name now—a pretty little thing in blue, all curls, for one more gallop."

"And this," said Charlie, with mock gravity, "is the domestic felicity we hear so much about?"

"Never mind, old fellow. We are not altogether unhappy, are we, Laura?"

"Nothing to complain about, at all events to such sceptics as that," and she threw an affectionate glance at her husband.

"It's true," continued Tom, "when you come to have to face a milliner's bill suddenly, it brings serious reflections along with it."

"Oh, don't tease me any more," said Laura, laughing. "Let's be rational."

"Delicious!" muttered Tom; "what could have put that into her head?"

"Be quiet, Tom, do. Tell me, Charlie, have you heard anything from the Crimea, lately? I know you hear occasionally from Mr. Travers. I'm so interested about his well-being, on account of poor Breezie Langton. She's such a dear girl, and it is so lonely for her, poor thing, with her lover and father both away--living by herself, too. I go down and see her as often as I can."

"Yes; by the way, one of the very things I wanted to see you about, I brought his letter to show you. I got a most amusing yarn from Jack yesterday. Shall I read it out?"

"Yes, do please."

"Camp before Sebastopol, April 17, 1855."

"DEAR CHARLIE,

"Don't shy at the violets, and fancy you are in for a dose of woman's pathos from these parts. It's only me, and you can give the violets to any one you choose, Laura Lytlereck, if you see her.

("You'll find them in the envelope," observed Charlie, tossing it across.)

"I gathered them on the Inkermann battle-field only yesterday, in a spot that you may safely say was watered with blood last autumn, though there are but faint traces of that Sunday morning's work left now. How are you all getting on at home, and what is going to win the Derby? Wentworth looks to me like a 'real good thing;' but of course we can't know how much about it here.

"Do you recollect Herries, of 'ours?' he dined at head

quarters the other night, and described it something like dining in a telegraphic office. Click, click; message after message kept coming in from the generals in front. 'All quiet and very little firing.' It looks as if we meant *staying here*, don't it; telegraph lines down in all directions, and a railway nearly completed.

"The Russians made a stiffish sortie on us about three weeks ago, beating up both attacks; cost us some half score or so of officers, killed, wounded, and taken prisoners, and a proportionate number of men. Of course they were driven back, as no doubt they expected to be; but they had the best of it on the whole. One of my friends got winged, and another taken prisoner. The day after we had a flag of truce up for the purpose of burying the dead, and all met on the 'debateable ground.' There was a large muster of officers on both sides French, English, and Russian. All the amenities thoroughly carried out, interchange of cigars, and one old Russian major in particular was extremely busy with his snuff-box. His cap off and his box offered to whoever came near him. At the end of a couple of hours, the senior Russian officer walked up to the French commandant, took out his watch, and suggested time was up. The French officer proposed a cessation of hostilities for another fifteen minutes, till we all got comfortably back. At the end of that time down went the white flags, and we immediately plumped a ten-inch shell into the Mamelon. What we call the courtesies of war, Charlie; quite reverting to the age of chivalry, taking a pinch out of the Russian major's box one minute, and a shot at him with an Enfield the next.

"Our cry at present out here is, where are our reinforcements? The weather is fine, and our men would be healthy if they were not killed by trench work. Last night was the third night running our fellows have had in 'the Ditches.'

"Our fraternization with our gallant allies is fraught with great difficulties, so many of us being indifferent Frenchmen. They are hospitable as Arabs if you go to see them; but have

a way of returning your call by dropping in about eleven, A.M. ; spending the day and staying till midnight, which is embarrassing. It becomes fatiguing, interchanging ideas by broken language and pantomime for ten hours or so.

"For my part, having found they are death on egg-flip, I produce it quickly : it is always received with a smack of the lips, and 'Ah, c'est bon zee egg-sleep,' and as my servant has instructions to keep increasing the strength of every brew, I generally, in the turf vernacular, 'have 'em safe about four.' We a little overdid it, though, the other day, and had to find a bed for a Captain of Dragoons who got overcome ; otherwise they generally make their adieu as soon as they find they are 'bit.'"

"Charlie," said Laura, laughing, "you don't believe Mr. Travers about his 'egg-sleep,' do you?"

"Yes, nothing more probable. Just the sort of thing Jack would delight in."

"Yes, and fancy these unfortunate Frenchmen," broke in Tom, "accustomed to the imbibition, if there is such a word, of nothing but light claret, suddenly put to pass an afternoon on the stiffest of egg-flip."

"Oh ! I don't know," said Charlie, "some of them dabble a little in absinthe, recollect. If you drink that, I fancy you can drink anything."

"Well, never mind," said Laura. "Go, on, Charlie ; it's a most amusing letter."

"Do you recollect young Rolls, Crumbs as we call him?" continued Charlie, reading. "He's great in French society—immense in patter and pantomime. We have a couple of good stories about him, and true ones, too, mind, which I must tell you."

"He and I were out riding the other day, and pulled up at a French canteen, got a fellow to hold the ponies, and went in. There was a knot of French officers drinking there, who raised their caps, smiled pleasantly, and tossed off their glasses with an '*à votre santé, Messieurs.*' We bowed and grinned, and

then one came across and asked us to join them in a bowl of 'zee champagne ponche.'

" '*Avec beaucoup de plaisir, Monsieur,*' cried Crumbs.

"We drank that, and then Rolls and I considered we ought to stand one, so we ordered in some champagne which one of the Frenchmen manufactured. It was the deuce to drink; sweet champagne, sweetened again with sugar. Can you fancy anything much nastier?

" '*C'est bon, n'est-ce pas ?*' inquired the Frenchman.

" '*Ah, oui, avec beaucoup de plaisir,*' responded Rolls.

"Well, we *trinquéd*, clinked glasses immensely, and did a deal of fraternization. At last the bugles sounded the last post. The Frenchmen rose with many bows, they deplored they must leave us, shrugged their shoulders, said they were *desolé*; but duty must be their excuse.

" '*Ah, oui, Messieurs,*' replied Rolls, bowing like a Mandarin. '*Avec beaucoup de plaisir. Bon soir, Messieurs.*'

"Crumbs faintly denies it, but it's a true bill."

Charlie's reading was here interrupted by the laughter of his auditors.

Laura, in particular, was tremendously tickled by the story, and declared she should never be happy till Tom had brought Mr. Rolls there to dinner; "Though what I should do if you did, Tom, I don't know; I couldn't look at him without thinking of '*avec beaucoup de plaisir.*'"

"Well, as far as one can see, your gravity is not likely to be taxed just yet. He's three thousand miles away in the first place, and I don't know him in the second. Do you, Charlie?"

"Just recollect meeting him once or twice with the regiment, that's all," replied Charlie. "Will you have the rest? the other story's not bad."

"Oh, dear, yes," cried Laura; "let's hear it. Why don't Mr. Travers send his letters to something or somebody?"

"Wish to goodness he'd send them to me," said Tom, taking a most literary view of the question.

"The other is this," continued Charlie, once more resuming his reading. "It was a mixed party at an English officer's hut. Several French officers present. There had been a good deal of singing, toast-drinking, &c. ; 'they are jolly good fellows' had been chorused more than once. Suddenly a French officer, one of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, started to his feet and said he had a toast to propose. Silence was proclaimed with some little difficulty.

"The Frenchman, in a short speech, begged to propose 'The memory of those who had fallen before Sebastopol.'

"*En silence, Messieurs,*" he continued, raising his glass.

"That unlucky Crumbs who was chaffing in a corner with a friend, equally destitute of French, immediately sprang to his feet and burst out with—

" 'They are jolly good fellows, which nobody can deny.'

"The Frenchman ground his teeth, and muttered *sacré*. The Englishmen, who understood the toast, looked aghast, and it was not till some one who understood the extent of Crumbs' French had forcibly put him down, explained and apologised, that the Frenchman was pacified.

"Still, Crumbs' daring attempts at the language are beyond all praise.

"Well, our second bombardment is just over, and the Russian batteries, beyond looking a little pitted, are very little the worse. The whole thing has been a failure.

"There, I have spun you 'no end of a twister,' as they say, and expect two average letters back. Love to your sister and people, also to the Lytlerecks when you see them. In the meantime,

"Ever, dear Charlie, yours,

"JACK TRAVERS."

"Ah!" said Tom, critically, "they are two rattling good stories; but I like the first one best. What a deal of story and

anecdote a man might pick up out there. I've no doubt Langton has a budget of them, that he has not yet served up in the papers. Keeping them back for a book, of course. I half wish I was there."

"You don't do anything of the kind, sir," said Laura. "You might never come back to relate them. Besides, what's to become of me, I should like to know?"

"By Jove, yes, I forgot you temporarily," replied Tom. "What a blow it would be for your relatives, too, who flattered themselves they had got rid of you, to have sent you back on their hands as a widow, lamenting. Come and smoke a cigar, Charlie, in my den. You'd better go to bed, my dear."

"No," said Laura, "I shall come and sit a little while with you."

"All right, then, little woman, ring the bell, and tell them to take the lamp there. Only don't blame Charlie and me if the dress smells of tobacco in the morning."

"Well," laughed Laura, "it's been there a good many times before. We generally sit there when we're alone. He writes and I read. Sometimes I get manuscript to copy or check. Sometimes pens to mend. Don't you think he does all the work, Charlie. I assure you, like the printer's devil, I've a deal to say to it."

"She isn't a bad assistant, and that's a fact," said Tom; "but come along."

"Yes, and we'll have what he calls a 'night off,' a good cheery gossip."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"WOMEN ARE KITTLE CATTLE TO SHOE."

THE vagaries of fashion are wonderful. Still fashion continually repeats itself. The dames of Imperial Rome wore false hair and complexions two thousand years ago, much as ladies of

Imperial London do now. Crinoline is but the hoops of the early Georges. Knickerbockers were worn in the days of the Stuarts.

"It's a d—d atheistical age, wife!"

quoth Sir John Brute. Certes, belief seems to get harder day by day. I pity men who have dabbled in theatricals, and have so become conversant with what can be done with a little rouge, powder, Indian ink, a camel-hair brush, burnt cork, and a lining wire. For my part I bitterly regret my lost innocence; I had infinitely rather believe in those magnificent toilettes and brilliant complexions. Now, I sometimes question if we should know our dearest female relations, did we by chance meet them as nature made them. A sceptical friend of mine, when called upon last year to admire a gorgeous specimen of fashionable beauty, retorted that "he was a sincere follower of the best masters, and preferred Millais to the works of inferior artists."

Trains get longer and longer. Fashion reverts to the time of Charles II. Dresses are worn lower and lower; fashion is recurring to the days of the Regency to that mode which called forth Sheridan's bitter line,

"And bare their bodies as they mask their minds."

Are we returning to that period in our morality also?

I really forget what was the fashion fourteen years ago. Our masculine memories retain these things but badly. Still, I have an idea that women trusted more to their own hair in those days, and less to the *coiffeurs*; and yet I have a shadowy recollection of plaited coronets, that sometimes were not quite the same shade as the silken tresses they crossed. Perhaps I was more credulous in those days, more prone to believe,

"Whatever is is right."

As we get older we lapse into scepticism, and are apt to think everything is deteriorating. As De Quincey says: "Thunder

and lightning are not the thunder and lightning I remember. Roses are degenerating. The Fannies of our island are not visibly improving."

But a truce to digression. What have the vagaries of fashion to do with this story?

High swells the fatal chorus of the 'Eumenides.' Disgraceful, cry her compeers, ever keen to ostracize and cast their shells into the ballot box. What has she done? Flirted dreadfully with her old lover. My dear lady, you cannot have mixed in good society if that shocks you. Never mind the conventionalities. Let us talk of the world as it is, not as they tell us it should be.

Belle Bartley loved Charlie Repton, and married the stockbroker. It's an everyday occurrence.

Few women marry the man they love. They may come to do so afterwards, but they don't do it to begin with. It is very natural—the nice people never have any money. We can't get on without carriages and opera boxes, so providence and chaperones arrange it for us.

Belle is looking extremely handsome this season. The influence of love has softened her stately beauty. The proud grey eyes are more than ever bewitching in their languor. Repton is ever at her side. She seems to have shut her eyes to the consequences, and to have abandoned herself entirely to her passion. Belle's few friends tremble for her. She alone, perhaps, is ignorant how busy scandal is with her name.

The passion-tossed, we are told, generally bear the lines thereof in their faces, whether for good or evil, whether they struggle against the tide, or drift helpless with the stream. I cannot say I believe this. Some of the smoothest faces I have ever seen have been worn by men and women whose past lives were not good to look back upon. Grief and hardship have more to do with it. Still, women, even in their sorrow, are seldom given to ignoring "the appearances." Widows, in particular, are wont to pay great attention to their mourning.

Some of them may have had happy releases, certainly. That men do drink and behave badly to their wives, there is no denying. We do not knock them down in good society ; but you can put an educated woman through more severe torture than personal violence.

Did you ever read "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table?" Wendell-Holmes says therein :—

"I am satisfied that there are as great masters of this nerve-playing as Vicuxtemps or Thalberg in their lines of performance. Married life is the school in which the most accomplished artists in this department are found. A delicate woman is the best instrument, she has such a magnificent compass of sensibilities. From the deep inward moan which follows pressure on the great nerves of right, to the sharp cry as the filaments of taste are struck with a crashing sweep, is a range which no other instrument possesses. A few exercises on it daily at home fit a man wonderfully for his habitual labours, and refresh him immensely as he returns from them. No stranger can get a great many notes of torture out of a human soul—it takes one that knows it well."

I have said before, things had not been looking pleasant in the City for some time. War, as a matter of course, had exercised its usual depressing effect upon all sorts of securities : in short, the money market was desperately tight. Mr. Bartley, like many other men, made the very commonplace mistake of losing his temper, as he lost his money. Speculations had turned out delusive and unprofitable. The stockbroker's temper waxed acidulated and snappish. He wanted money to carry on some of his schemes. He found he had to pay pretty heavily for the accommodation. He grew morose over his port and filberts, and actually snarled at his wife's *moirés*, grew petulant on the subject of opera boxes, and sneered at Belle's French maid.

Now, as he had never imparted his money difficulties to his wife—indeed, there were few confidences between those two—

it is not to be supposed that a high-spirited woman like Belle would bear these little attacks with much patience. He never suggested any reduction of expenditure or establishment, but simply quarrelled with the cost thereof. Like most men accustomed to wealth, when in difficulties, he had not the moral courage to acknowledge his position. Belle, on her side, in utter ignorance of the true state of affairs, thought her husband had turned disagreeable and miserly. Had she known the truth, she would have proved a true wife to him. Had she loved him, she would have rather gloried in the sacrifice of some luxury. What woman who loves, does not glory in mild martyrdom? Belle did not love in this case; but she had a deal of natural chivalry in her disposition. She had fought many a gallant fight in behalf of the oppressed of her little world, as the penniless Miss Brabazon. She was not the woman to be afraid of abandoning luxuries, if you showed her why and wherefore. If you marry a fool, tell her as little as may be; but if you have the luck to marry a sensible woman, the less you keep from her the better.

When to all this, you add the man she really does love ever lounging by her side, and unmistakably showing his devotion, if Belle is not on the verge of a domestic convulsion, she is a fortunate woman. I am writing not of high-principled people who have their passions under perfect control, but of weak, frail, worldly mortals, to whom sore temptation is a sore struggle; who perhaps come out of the trial triumphant, but bearing reproachful scars on their breasts, if not on their faces. Those who have never known temptation should look with some little leniency on their fallen brothers and sisters. Stealing a loaf is indefensible; but ere you administer the extreme penalty of the law, pause and think whether you ever knew what starvation really means.

And so the domestic fend raged, and those whose union had been an unblest lie, sundered wider and wider. They had married without love. Neither had ever sought the other's

love or confidence. No feeling of jealousy mingled with the stockbroker's wrath. A man of slow feelings and dull perceptions out of his own vocation, he was merely venting on his wife the ill-humour caused by unsuccessful speculation. Exasperated because she refused to bend, and fiercely returned taunt for taunt. It was left for a foolish woman to light the train.

Mrs. Inglemere has figured but slightly in these pages. Still, as "walking ladies" and "gentlemen" on the stage sometimes have a good deal to do with the action of the drama, so in real life you will find catastrophes, crises, or whatever you may please to call them, brought about or averted by men and women who scarcely figure as foreground characters in the tangled woof of our lives. Like the walking gentleman of the stage, they seem to cross our path to deliver the important message, letter, or piece of information that makes or mars us, and never more to be associated with our career.

Now Mrs. Inglemere might be a foolish woman; but she only acted after the manner of women generally, when having come to the conclusion that Charlie Repton was in love with her, she at once put him down as her own peculiar property. Women are wont to do this whether their own feelings are interested or not, and are apt to resent bitterly any breach of allegiance, even amongst those on whom their smiles have fallen chill as "the pale moonlight."

Charlie Repton could plead no excuse of this kind. On him the widow had lavished her sunniest smiles. He had ever been a most favoured cavalier. By careful reticence, by accomplished use of her magnificent eyes—"playing her eyelids like Venetian blinds," as Sheridan has it—by a judicious display of her pearly teeth, to say nothing of the graceful posing of her really perfect figure, she had kept him enchained for some time. A man may be in love with two women at the same time; but if they once meet on equal terms before him, he speedily succumbs entirely to one. Mrs. Inglemere had quite made up her mind to marry

him. She probably would have done so ; but after again meeting Belle Bartley with her sparkling conversation, animated manner, real cleverness and acute observation, Charlie found talking to Mrs. Inglemere wearisome and boring.

Frightful fatality ! Oh, woman, when we once take to yawning, thy sceptre has departed ! You might as well waste your smiles on the nearest asphalt. Heaven only know what fools you may make of us in our hour of weakness ; but when man is once bored by your pretty prattle, he has burst his fetters—he will eschew the boudoir for the smoking-room once more.

Mrs. Inglemere might be a weak woman ; but that did not prevent her being a spiteful one—moreover, had not her vanity been wounded ? Few women and not many men can altogether forgive that. She had not strength of character to become a revengeful woman, so she simply became a malicious one. She was wroth with Charlie Repton ; but the full tide of her indignation was naturally reserved for Belle. She pondered deeply how this slight to her vanity should be atoned for. She had hazarded one or two skirmishes with Belle, on the few occasions they had encountered each other in society—a dangerous experiment that showed how deeply she resented Charlie's desertion. The extremely unsatisfactory result of such left her more embittered than ever against her rival, and angry with herself, for having so far forgotten her rôle, as to try conclusions in words with anybody on any point. She knew she was not clever ; but she knew she was handsome, and showed perfect teeth when she smiled. How could she have been so foolish as to forget her part was to look beautiful, and trust to her charms, not her conversation. Women do make this mistake sometimes ; Helena sets up for Aspacia, and Venus for the Queen of Sheba. Born a beauty, she would fain be praised for her wit.

Failure in women of this kind leaves a bitter sting behind. Mrs. Inglemere felt extremely spiteful on the occasion, and was quite willing to wreak that spite, with little regard to consequences, whenever she should see her way.

She watched the imprudent flirtation of Belle and Charlie Repton with mingled feelings of gratification and annoyance. She had not patience to wait for the *dénouement* she so anxiously expected, and in an evil hour made up her mind to accelerate it. She had already contributed her quota to swell the tide of scandal now running tolerably strong against poor Belle; but what she called "the stock-broker's obtuseness," irritated her. Suppose she should give him a hint on the subject! But how? She barely knew him to bow to. Good! Yes, she might write. No need for putting her name to the letter? It was only right the poor man's eyes should be opened. Mrs. Inglemere had naturally put the very worst possible construction on Belle's flirtation. It was true, she had heard of anonymous letters recoiling rather heavily on their writers. Tush! it would never be traced to her; besides, she would confine herself simply to the truth, merely what all the world knew. It was high time Mrs. Bartley was ostracised, and made aware she had forfeited her position—that her caste was gone—that she was without the pale. Then if Mr. Repton's infatuation for that designing, degraded woman continued, she was sorry for him, that was all. Perhaps, too, after his eyes were opened, he might return to his lawful allegiance. Who could tell? Yes; that would be a triumph worth having.

So one fine afternoon the handsome widow sat down, and, after much thought, indited the following pleasant little note to John Bartley, Esq.

"Will you remain wilfully blind to what all the world is talking of? Do you intend to remain passive and acquiescent in your own dishonour? Are you the easy-going husband who sees everything with his wife's eyes, or has her will and temper crushed all independence out of you? Are you her slave, or her master? Do you tremble at her frown, or dare you assert your own authority? If you have any manhood

left, and do not wish to figure in the contemptible character of an injured husband, it is time to put a stop to the scandal connected with your name. A little later and it will be beyond your control, as also will probably be your wife. If you do not now see your danger, I am sorry for you, and must deem you far blinder than

“A LOOKER-ON.”

The widow dropped this precious epistle into the post office with her own hand, and rather nervously waited the result.

Of course she anticipated a furious scene between Belle and her husband, which she concluded would lead to the catastrophe she so anxiously desired.

Mr. Bartley received his letter in due time. He read it over, and walked away to his own room. It was a letter calculated to disturb most men ; but Mrs. Inglemere had no knowledge of Bartley's temperament, or she would scarcely have resorted to this expedient.

He was a man of phlegmatic disposition, and though acute enough in business matters, of no very keen perception upon other points. The result was this, that instead of being thrown into a state of indignation, or crushed with despair as other men might have been, his natural phlegm induced him in the first instance to merely sit down and think the matter over. It was a course, though perhaps the best he could pursue, that not one man in a thousand would have followed. You must bear in mind that he had been actuated by no sentiment in his wedding with Belle ; he had wanted a wife, much as he might have wanted a pair of carriage horses ; there had been neither love nor esteem between these two since their ill-starred marriage—she had gone her way, and he his. As long as she looked well at the head of his table and entertained his guests pleasantly, he had troubled himself about little else ; and to do Belle justice, she had always made herself agreeable to his business friends, though she had rather shirked their return of hospitality.

Moreover, Bartley, in the way of business, had seen a good deal of bogus telegrams, false reports, rigged markets, and even anonymous letters to the disparagement of certain firms, so that he was not at all prepared to swallow the bait off-hand.

He read it over some half-dozen times, and then sat with the letter in his hand, pondering over it. First of all, immersed as he was in business, being no very close observer and seeing as little as he did of his wife and her friends, he was not very clear as to whom it alluded. Secondly, who was his correspondent? It was evidently a lady's handwriting; he had few female relatives, and no feminine friends or correspondents. Thirdly, it was an anonymous letter, and such he generally looked upon as malicious fabrications with some ulterior object in view.

Though somewhat puzzled, he came to the conclusion that the accusation was false. Still, Belle had angered him much lately. Quarrels had been rife between them, and Belle's cutting retorts had left a sting behind. Finally, he thought that it might be made a formidable weapon in his hands, with which to curb his somewhat rebellious wife, and, in the meantime, he would watch closely to discover whom his unknown correspondent might have indicated as dangerous to his domestic felicity.

When a man once makes up his mind to seek information on such a point as this, it is astounding how intelligence pours in upon him; and ere forty-eight hours were over, numberless kind friends had dilated upon how Mrs. Bartley was "carrying on" with that Mr. Repton, to her somewhat astonished husband.

Still the stock-broker had faith in his wife; that she was carrying on a desperate flirtation he had no doubt, and that the knowledge thereof should be applied effectively in the next family jar, he had firmly made up his mind; but he acquitted her of aught else, and summed up his unknown correspondent's letter with,

"Exaggerated, no doubt, though the old adage is generally true: 'There's no smoke without some fire.' I recollect when I got that unsigned slip of paper, to say Bilson and Weeble must stop payment on the Monday. They didn't, but they owned afterwards it was very near it. A discharged clerk gave me that bit of information, and if I had pressed them, I shouldn't have got ten shillings in the pound. No—they had to give me good terms not to swamp them, and so shall you, Mrs. Bartley, at our next difference. It won't be long before it comes, I'll be bound—more especially if things go on in the City as they have lately, and you continue to want money in the same inverse proportion. I believe I'm a d—d fool not to tell her the truth."

Perhaps he was; he was, at all events, right about one thing, and that was that he and Belle would differ shortly.

Contrary to custom, and slightly to his wife's astonishment, Mr. Bartley presented himself at her breakfast table some three or four days after the receipt of the above letter. Whether things looked so uncommonly unpleasant in the City that he really could not stand looking at them any longer, or whether he could not further resist the temptation of trying the effect of his newly acquired information on his wife's haughty spirit, I don't know; however, there he was.

"A somewhat unexpected pleasure," cried Belle, gaily, as she entered the room and saw her husband lounging over the paper.

"Glad you think so," was the somewhat ungracious rejoinder. "It's not often I favour you; shall I ring, or do you expect anyone else?"

"Oh dear, no, not likely. Poor Breezie Langton is the only person who ever breaks the solitude of my breakfast-table, and she always drops a line to say she's coming. It's not often now, poor child, that she can pluck up heart to come and see even me. No wonder, with her father and her lover both out in that horrid Crimea."

"I thought, perhaps you were in the habit of receiving *your intimates* at breakfast. Not unusual, I believe, is it, amongst your fashionable associates!"

Belle gazed keenly at her husband. There would not have been much in the words, had it not been for the sneering tones in which they were uttered. Already she felt intuitively that the domestic barometer was falling, and that there were strong indications of a storm.

She replied carelessly, though with a shade of defiance in her tone :

"I don't know what other people do. I breakfast alone, because I like it best; I hate the bother of having to entertain people in the morning."

"And yet, if my information is correct, you are never tired of entertaining some of your friends."

"I am not good at riddles," she replied, coldly, "and can only trust you thoroughly understand your information, *however* obtained."

His face flushed at the taunt.

"At all events, Madam, report says you are more partial to *tête-à-têtes* than the generality of wives."

"Indeed! I can't say I'm favourably impressed with the present."

He set his teeth; for a few seconds his passion all but induced him to burst forth in a torrent of invective and accusation. Mastering it by strong effort, he exclaimed :

"Perhaps not! A *tête-à-tête* with one's husband is, I am aware, not recognised in good society. May I trouble you for another cup of tea?"

Belle handed it to him in silence.

"By the way, I want to have the Glumbersons to dinner here on Thursday night. Get a few people to meet them."

"I am sorry I can't; I have made arrangements to go to the Opera that evening. You must have the Glumbersons some other night."

"But I tell you it don't suit me to have them any other night. You must put off your opera engagement."

"Indeed I shall not," replied Belle; "had you told me you wanted a dinner party that night, I would not have made it. Now, either have your dinner without me, or have it some other night."

"I tell you I have particular reasons for wishing them to dine here on that evening."

"Perhaps you will condescend to explain what those particular reasons may be?" rejoined Belle calmly.

"No, it is not in the least necessary that you should be acquainted with the reasons for all my actions."

"Apparently not, judging by the extent to which you honour me with your confidence."

"If all I hear is true, a devilish deal too far, Madam."

"If you are about to use coarse language, Mr. Bartley, perhaps you will permit me to retire;" and Belle rose from her seat. "I'm not accustomed to be sworn at."

"Sworn at, or not, you will stay till you have heard what I have got to say to you. Do you see this letter? Do you know what it contains? Do you know that in it I am asked if I intend 'to remain acquiescent in my own dishonour?' Do you know that I am warned it is time to 'put a stop to this scandal on my name?' That an unknown correspondent tells me that if I don't restrain my wife now, she will, ere long, be beyond the reach of my control? Do you think that I—"

"Stop, sir!" and Belle's voice rung out clear, cold, and silvery. Her cheek had paled a little at the first burst of the torrent, for she knew she was not wholly guiltless; but her woman's wit hit off the weak phrase of "unknown correspondent" like lightning.

"Stop, sir!" she repeated, drawing herself up to her full height. "And you dare to meet me with this vile accusa-

tion on the strength of an anonymous letter. Let me see it."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," he replied, sulkily, already cowed by her manner, and it must be borne in mind but partially believing in the letter.

"I insist," she replied. "I claim it as my right. Every criminal—" here her lip curled, and no words can describe the bitterness of her tone, "every criminal is allowed to see upon what charges he is arraigned."

"I have told you you should not see it," he replied.

"Then let me pass. Had you been a man you would never have rested till you knew who traced those vile lines. It were time enough to talk to me then. May I trouble you," and she motioned to him to open the door as she swept towards it.

An execration was Bartley's only response, as he turned savagely away, and Belle was constrained to perform that office for herself. Bartley remained for some time musing, occasionally bursting forth into fierce imprecations. It was certain this new receipt for taming his wife had turned out a total failure, and with what he considered a charge to crush any woman, he had been signally worsted.

"Curse her," he said, "why did I marry her? There's no meeting that slippery tongue of hers. She always has, and I suppose always will, beat me to the end of the chapter. She's worth angering too, though; by Jove, how handsome she looked in her rage. But I'll cow her yet; she shall fear me before I've done."

CHAPTER XXIX.

DISCARDING A LOVER.

WHEN Belle regained her own room, her nerves rather gave way. She bathed her temples with Eau de Cologne, and sat down to think. She was quite aware, that before any one would have dared to conceive the idea of writing an anonymous letter about her proceedings, that they must have been tolerably well canvassed in her own circle.

She had put a bold face on it to her husband ; but the defiant front had vanished now, and Belle felt very miserable. She knew too well what scandal could do when the tide ran strong. She had seen women "dropped" before now. She thought of the upraised eyebrows of her dear friends, and the "Poor thing, I'm so shocked. Pray don't mention her ; I never could have believed it." Had it come to this with her ? Where had she drifted to ? How far had her imprudence led her ? That rather sarcastic tongue of hers had done her no good. There were plenty of people who would willingly cast a stone her way.

Then she thought of her husband. True, she despised him. She had married him in a moment of pique, while her heart was another man's ; but till lately, he had been kind to her in his way, grudging her nothing. Might not her own conduct have wrought the change ? Then she thought of Charlie Repton. Her face softened, and she owned to herself that she did love him dearly. Ah ! why had they quarrelled ? Why, in that fit of indignation, had she yielded to her aunt's persuasions, and accepted Mr. Bartley's offer ? Why had Charlie not spoken before ? She knew he loved her all along. Had she been too hard upon him ? No, it was his fault. No—she ought to have waited ; and here Belle burst into tears, and indulged in the luxury of a good cry.

What was to be done now? She must see no more of Charlie, of course; and then she shuddered at the idea of how lonely her life would seem under that restriction; and after all, might it not be too late even now to set herself right with the world? Odd, no whisper of the scandal had ever reached her ears before. It would have been curious if it had. Are not the actors in such scenes always the last to hear how the world regards their proceedings? and if their intimate friends do call their attention to society's innuendos, are they not, of course, immediately pooh poohed, and intimate friends no longer? We know it is so, and the proverb that "reckless man must have his way," is equally applicable to "reckless women."

It has been the fashion to describe women, particularly wives, as having a decided prejudice against clubs. Their prejudices have been attributed to the selfishness and taste for luxury thereby engendered.

For my part, I imagine that the far-seeing eyes of the matrons of England at once detected that a smoking-room congregation would prove as scandalous as a dowager's tea-table, and at once made a stand against such an infringement of their privileges. It is certain that when a lady oversteps the limits of prudence, the club smoking-rooms are not quite the last place in which she is tried and sentenced without evidence.

Now, the *Thermopolium* was no worse than its neighbours; but its numerous members were to a considerable extent men "about town," and poor Belle's case had not escaped the eyes of these critical and not over scrupulous commentators. They would have delighted Mrs. Inglemere, for they quite agreed with her in predicting the worst. One authority there had gone the length, indeed, at the termination of a *séance*, in which the case had been somewhat fully discussed, of expressing his opinion, on the subject, by the remark of "Take any one's two ponies it's a bolt before the season is over;" but he had been sceptical ever about the existence of much virtue in human nature.

Yes, the chorus swells rapidly on these occasions. Since the

days of King Midas it has been ever so. Of course, charming women have no business to get into such scrapes; but alas! it's the charming women who always do get into these scrapes, and then do not their plainer and less interesting sisters let them know that they have done so? As long as you do not outrage the proprieties, it matters little what you may do. Once rend the flimsy veil that covers them, and who troubles themselves about the truth of the arraignment? You are lynched by your dearest friends without further inquiry.

The day wore on, and still Belle sat lost in thought. Who was her anonymous accuser? How she did wish she had seen that letter. It might have given her some clue as to whence the attack came from; but her husband had refused to show it to her. She would ask him for it no more. Then she bethought her whether she had a friend to consult in her trouble. No, not one. The only one she could have confided in and asked advice from, was thousands of miles away. Yes; had Cis Langton been in England, she would have told him all, and abided by his decision. Now, there was but one thing for it. She must see Charlie Repton. She knew he was neither a proper confidant nor adviser. Who could be worse? Still she must see him once more. It should be the last time. She must tell him that all was over, must be over, between them. Tell him—ah! no, not that; he must never know how she had, how she still loved him. Yes, she must see him, and that to-day. Had she better write a few lines to say she begged he would call? No; it was not often he missed now. He knew she had no engagement that day; best leave it to chance.

As if there was much chance about it; but it was, perhaps, soothing to her conscience to think so. How many of us do likewise, and palliate our transgressions by laying them in the chapter of accidents, forgetting how much we ourselves have contributed towards the accident.

Bartley having relieved his feelings by a soliloquy of swearing in the breakfast-room to begin with, had, perhaps, feeling

that such a flow of language ought not to be thrown away, indulged the household generally with the tail end of the storm. Having brought the butler to a state of great nervous trepidation, threatened the cook with warning, and frightened a stray housemaid nearly out of the little wits she possessed, he condescended to tell the butler to order "the — coachman to bring the brougham, and not be all day about it," which, for his own comfort, the butler took very good care he should not be. Then, to the great delight of his household, Mr. Bartley drove off to see what they were doing in the — City.

Things had been looking black in the said City for some time, but now they had become positively inky. Glorious war is inimical to commercial prosperity, and Victoria Crosses play the deuce with the price of cotton, &c. When Government must have money, and lots of it, private speculators have to pay high for accommodation. The nation is speculating in glory, and doubling on every reverse. C.B.'s, it's a fact, though a curious one, affect the carrying trade, and a great victory increases the price of tonnage. War! war! there's plenty of money to be made in war, though not by war. Commerce flows out of the old channels which get rather clogged in these days; but the army requires breeches and boots, and the Government don't look much into the material, as long as it holds together till shipped. There is a great opening for those who see it, and every Crimean medal will pay them its weight in gold. Why, if you have but a ship or two, you may make their price in "demurrage" before six months are over. But Mr. Bartley, unfortunately for himself, had not speculated on the wants of the Crimean army, and, to use his own phrase, "Everything was down to nothing."

When all securities present that phase, and you are an extensive speculator, it's odds that ruin overtakes you, and this is pretty much what Bartley felt must shortly be his destiny. Now he had been, to a certain extent, the architect of his own fortunes, felt a pride in the fortune he had made, and was

proud of his name on 'Change. It was a heavy blow to this man to find the whole fabric crumbling beneath his feet, and that from no reckless speculating, but simply from the natural depreciation of all property that a state of war inevitably produces. No wonder he felt soured and morose ; but as his wife was in utter ignorance of his affairs, it was hardly fair to shower his ill-temper on her head.

Who Bartley's father was, is a question I don't think anyone could answer. One took it for granted he had a father, and that was all. Some of his City friends might know the fact, though I doubt it. Otherwise, one would have as soon thought of asking him who his father was, as from whom he got his boots, a point on which, except for purposes of curiosity, no mortal could be desirous of discovery. Anyhow, to this day, that remains a mystery. He had some money to start with and made a plum, is all I know concerning him.

But I must leave Bartley to struggle with the adepts of the Exchange, to dive into those mysterious little parlours where things are done at five-eighths for the settling, &c. ; merely remarking how very much simpler a Tattersall's Monday seems to my uninitiated senses, and return to poor Belle, whom we left feebly devising how best to meet the fatal chorus of the Eumenides.

Belle had not to wait very long. Some half hour or so before luncheon time, came a tap at the door, and Belle's maid informed her that Mr. Repton was in the drawing-room.

" Say I'll be down in a few minutes," and then Belle began to collect herself for the interview. It was not quite such an easy task to let Charlie Repton know the precise state of affairs, and also that she would see him no more. Easy it might have been if she cared nothing about him, but then, unfortunately, she did care a good deal. Her woman's intuitive tact, too, told her that Charlie had been dreadfully in earnest lately. Of course she had no business to have allowed him to be so much in earnest. Flirtation is a game of counters ; but she knew they

statues. A little pale from the morning's scene and after-reflections, while her magnificent grey eyes had a dreamy languor about them, that her husband, who had seen them flash in the breakfast-room, could have hardly believed in. She looked beautiful then ; but the stately beauty of the morning had softened into something much more seductive,

afternoon?" continued Charlie. "Shall you ride, and if so, will you accept me as your escort?"

"No, I don't think I shall ride," said Belle, musingly.

"Well, if you drive, will you give me a seat?"

"No," said Belle, and she looked steadily at him.

"What's the matter—are you ill?" inquired Charlie.

"Yes—no, I don't know what's the matter with me. Excuse me, I have had a disagreeable morning, and don't feel quite myself."

"Good heavens! I am so sorry, and here am I boring you about riding and driving. Like my stupidity. Tell me what it is. Can I be of any use? You know well I utter no idle words, when I say that it would be a real pleasure to me if I could be of any assistance?"

"Yes," she said, "you can—you must; I wanted to see you to-day—if I never see you again. Do you know that scandal has been busy with my name—that the world's gossip already couples it with yours? Do you know that anonymous scribblers have dared to write to my husband, and insinuate—I won't sully my lips by naming it; but you can be at no loss to guess. Have you heard this rumour?"

Charlie hesitated; undoubtedly he was aware that his name had been coupled with Belle's in the talk of the town.

"You have," she continued. "I can see it in your face—Charlie Repton, was it well done to expose me to this?"

"Belle, I love you!" he muttered faintly.

"Yes, I suppose so. Love me as you men do love us poor

women, in your own selfish way, and you would sacrifice me without scruple, sooner than give up the gratification of seeing me every day. Ah ! I have been a fool ; but Charlie, Charlie, I did think better of you ! I thought you loved me too well. I thought if you had known that—" And here Belle gave way, and burst into tears.

"Belle, don't cry ; listen to me. If you knew all I have suffered since your marriage, you would be merciful. I have always loved you ; but I never knew how much till I found I had lost you. Lost you, I have thought—you know whether rightly—through my own folly, pride, want of purpose, what you will. There were times in the old days, when I thought, and still think, that if I had asked you to be my wife, you might have said yes. But I threw—fool that I was—my chance of happiness away ; you must recollect on what pitiful grounds. I little knew then, that when next we met, you would be married, and that I should discover too surely that I had let another carry off the only woman I ever really did or ever shall love. I thought we should meet again, and that you would be still Miss Brabazon. It was not so—to see you once more was to feel the old spell around me stronger than ever. I could not help myself. It was happiness to see you !—sweet intoxication to listen to your voice ! I thought of nothing else. I don't defend myself. I only say I love you, and that no power can prevent. If I am never to speak to you again—never to hear your voice again, till stricken by death or blindness, I will yet see you, if it be but as you pass through the streets. I may have done you grievous harm—you, whom I would fain shield from every ill ; if it is so, pardon me, and make some allowance for the greatness of my love."

He was standing by her side, holding her hand in his, as he finished his passionate speech. What woman who loved the speaker could have listened unmoved to such an appeal ?

For a second, Belle's disengaged hand played caressingly with his hair, as she murmured, "My poor Charlie !" then draw-

ing her hand quickly from his, she rose, and stood opposite him.

"Charlie, dear," she said, "it's too late to talk of what might have been. We might, perhaps, have been happy together; but that's all gone by now. Sit down, and talk over what is best for us as it is. You must bury this love, and—I shouldn't like to think you could do it just yet—in time you will find somebody else who may be to you what you say I am."

"Never, Belle! and you know it. I have fancied myself in love many times in the course of my life; but you have taught me the little reality there was in such love. I never loved really, before. I shall not again."

Charlie said the last words in a quiet, resolute tone, that made Belle's cheek flush. She had not been woman, if she could have refrained from some secret exultation at hearing her proposition so firmly rejected. There was a silence between them of some two or three minutes. She stood, leaning her arm on the mantel-piece, and her cheek resting on her hand. She was the first to break silence.

"You must come here no more," she said. "Yes, it must be so!" she continued, making a gesture that he should not interrupt her. "You must do this for me. Leave town, and then it will appear all simple enough. They may say," she added, with a melancholy smile, "that I'm doomed 'to wear the willow.' Let them; it will be best so."

"You cannot mean to utterly banish me?" he said.

"I see no help for it. You must go."

"Oh, Belle! you never cared for me, or you could not tell me that."

"Hush!" she said. "Do you think I shall suffer no pain? Do you fancy that the time will pass very pleasantly for me? I shall have many a weary hour to endure, and many a bitter taunt to submit to. Charlie, won't you think of me a little?"

"I do!" he cried, vehemently. "Why should you endure all this? Is there no other way?"

"None!" she murmured, faintly.

"Yes, there is. Why should you waste your beauty and brightness on a man who appreciates neither—on one who knows not the pearl he possesses—who recognises not the graces of your mind—one whom you cannot love?"

"Oh, stop! stop!" she cried.

"No—hear me out!" he continued, passionately. "You know I speak truly. A man who insults you; who cares no more for you, or ever could care, more than he does for a carriage horse; who systematically neglects you. Belle, you know how I love you. There is one other way. Will you take it? Love such as ours should not be divided."

"Silence! Madness! You know not what you say—what you ask. Charlie!" she cried, vehemently, "I did think you would help me!" and Belle buried her face in her hands, and sobbed audibly.

"Dearest!" he murmured, "forgive me if I have frightened you." He was by her side now, and his arm stole round her waist. "I spoke passionately, for I felt so. It is so hard to think of losing you. Tell me it is not so!" and his lips touched her cheek.

For an instant she yielded to his embrace, then wrenched herself from him.

"Madness! folly!" she exclaimed. "Misery! destruction! No, I have asked you to be true to me, and you listen to nothing but the dictates of your own mad passion."

He made a movement towards her.

"No—stand back, sir! Charlie Repton, listen to me. I love you too well to involve you in what you propose. We part now, to meet no more for many a day; till we can meet once more as friends—till our pulses beat no longer as wildly as they do now. Till then, our paths must be wide apart."

"Cruel, cruel, ever!" he muttered.

"Unjust!" she cried. "You think you could face the world under such circumstances. I doubt you; but even so, have

you no thought for me—of my disgrace? Could you bear to see the woman you love ever pointed at with the finger of scorn?"

"I will risk all and everything!" he exclaimed, fiercely.

"Ever you, never me," she replied, sadly. "No, Charlie; I love you as much as ever woman loved man—too well, indeed, to do what you would have me. God for ever bless thee!" and she was gone.

He sprang forward to intercept her; but he was too late, the door closed behind her ere he could reach it. She did not trust herself to look round.

He stood for some minutes with his eyes on the door, then threw himself on a chair. Surely she would return? It was impossible they should part like that. The clock on the mantel-piece ticked with horrid monotony. Charlie felt as if he was in a dream. How long he had sat there he didn't know. At last he rose, and rang the bell.

"Will you inquire," he said to the servant who opened the door, "if I am to have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Bartley again?"

The man returned in a few minutes with—

"Mistress desires me to say, sir, that she has so bad a headache, it's impossible she can ride to-day, and she's going to lie down for the afternoon. Begs, sir, you will take luncheon without her."

Charlie picked up his hat, and followed the man down stairs.

"Thanks, no; I'm not hungry," he said, as the servant threw open the door of the dining-room, and Charlie found himself once more in the street.

Verily, if Mr. Bartley was a little morose, and inclined to dwell on his anonymous correspondent's communication that morning, he had better reason than he knew of for so doing.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STRANDS OF THE CORD.

A BLAZING May sun, such as we see but little of during that capricious month in these Isles, was shining down on the soft grassy banks of the Tchernaya. Some few days previous, our troops had advanced in force and re-occupied, without molestation, the redoubts and position lost on that fatal 26th of October, the day of the glorious death-ride of the Light Brigade. A day which bore to the lookers-on at Balaklava the same distinction as that bestowed on the remnant of the gallant band engaged in that deed of maddest chivalry. A day which makes the Russians sneer at our decorations, and contemptuously remark, "We thought you gave clasps for *victories*." A day of oblivion to many, of anguish to England, and heart-burning yet to the gallant survivors.

Three Turkish ponies picketed, are quietly cropping the sweet grass with a gusto, which ponies who have been hard worked and living on next to nothing only can appreciate. Wiry little brutes, with more or less a stamp of blood about them, which accounts for their hardihood and clever performances under welter weights on longish excursions. On the edge of the stream, some twenty yards off, lie three men sacrificing to the goddess "Vacuna." Shell jackets flying open; short pipes in their mouths, and a bottle of something or other circulating amongst them. They are old acquaintances of ours, to wit: Herries, Jack Travers, and Crumbs.

"Bless us, how jolly it is," remarked the latter, "after that hot dusty plateau and the hotter, dustier trenches, to get down here by the water amongst the grass, and smoke."

"Yes," replied Herries, stretching himself out, if anything, a little longer than before. "Wasn't a bad idea of yours, 'young 'un,' this ride. Send that claret across, if you've left any."

"All right, there's another bottle towing at the end of the string in the water there. I say, Jack, what are you thinking of? Out with it, your jokes don't improve by polishing."

"Well, I was thinking of poor little Clift. Sad thing, that poor boy's being shot. Only seventeen, and not out here more than six weeks; they ought not to send them out so young. You were close by at the time, Herries, weren't you?"

"Yes, it was in the advance, just where they are making the new saps. Very sketchy cover, you know; he was sitting with his back to two gabions getting his breakfast. Bullet came just between them, and cut his spine in two. Couldn't have suffered, he just moaned, winked his eyes some half-dozen times, and all was over."

"Poor fellow! yes, and he was so very cheery and full of fun."

They smoked on in silence for some minutes. Men get pretty indifferent to death when they see it occurring round them daily; still, they could but think sadly of the bright, gay, light-hearted school-boy (for he was little more), who had run so short a course among them; whom they were just learning to like for his fun, spirits, and good qualities; who, for such a few weeks, had dated his letters home so proudly, "Camp before Sebastopol;" now, alas! lying cold on Cathcart's Hill, while many a bitter tear was dropped at a quiet English vicarage for the fair-haired boy, who would be a soldier.

"I say, Jack!" suddenly exclaimed Crumbs, "I forgot to tell you. I've got a deuced good thing for these Third Division Races. You'll have to 'stand in,' more especially as I want your assistance."

"Why, you don't mean to tell me that Uncle Tom or the Dwarf are any good in the pony races, and I shouldn't place much reliance on that weedy chestnut thing you picked up the other day."

"Don't be hasty, Jack, I shall turn money over the weedy chestnut yet. I got her cheap in a lot with two dozen of mar-

malade, some flannel shirts, an India rubber tub, a broken down bedstead, a couple of bottles of curacao, and some other things. As for *The Uncle*," and here Crumbs turned round, and fondly regarded a very plain looking, but strong, black pony. "he's the best 'night hack' in the whole army, and will canter straight home to his own picket peg on the darkest possible night, from anywhere, in ours or the French lines, you choose to mention. He's worth forty guineas to any man who dines out much. But you haven't seen my last purchase, Jack, and don't deserve to for your confounded scepticism."

"What is it?"

"Well, it's a mule, if you must know, and a good one too."

"And what's the good of that?"

"Put him in the 'moke's race,' of course. He's a good big one, runs kind, and goes a fair pace."

"Well, but that cavalry mule that's won everything, will beat you."

"Don't you believe it; my mule, amongst his other eccentricities, of which kicking to start with is one, has conceived an enormous affection for *Uncle Tom* there, and will follow him like mad anywhere. If you'll only be at the straight run in on *The Uncle* to give me a lead home, he'll come quick enough to beat all the rest easy."

"Are you quite sure he can do it?"

"Quite; he can keep with *The Uncle* that distance well. I don't say *The Uncle* is fast, but he is fast among mules; the only chance is the brute may turn rusty at starting."

"You young nobbler," said Herries. "By the way, what became of you in that dog hunt on Monday, when we ran up to the monastery?"

"Oh, nothing much," replied Crumbs; "I wanted to see if that new chestnut could jump stone walls."

"Well?"

"Well, she couldn't."

"You came to grief, then?"

"Well, I don't call it 'coming to grief,' especially out here, unless you are broke seriously. If you mean, did I get a crupper? I should rather think I did, and intend to leave the finish of the education of that chestnut to her next owner. I say, you fellows, don't let out she can't jump," added Crumbs, with considerable anxiety.

"Not I," said Herries, laughing; "but I don't think you'll get well out of the chestnut, Crumbs."

"Oh, I don't know, there's a good deal of character about her head and tail, especially the latter—suit a Frenchman or an Infantry field-officer perhaps."

"Shut up, you inveterate young horse chaunter."

"I say, Jack, you'll have to give me that lead with The Uncle, in the run in for the moke race, just to mettle my animal up; spurs won't do, only make him kick, and he don't care a rush about ash plants."

"You think it a 'good thing,' then?" said Travers.

"'Good thing!' I shall back it for all my next half-year's field allowance. Don't grin, Herries, but put down your money; it's bound to come off."

"You're a sanguine young man. Jack and I have seen one or two 'good things' turn out hottish for backers ere this. But come along, the claret's done, and it's time to be moving. Besides, I'm not quite clear that I may not be for the trenches to-night."

"Then fill up my cup, then fill up my can,
Go saddle my horses and call out my men,"

sang Crumbs, as he went to draw the picket-pegs of the ponies.

"Now, gentlemen, 'boot and saddle,' and on we go again."

"What's become of Langton?" inquired Herries, as they walked their ponies slowly campwards. "I haven't seen him our way for a good bit."

"No; after the failure of the April bombardment, he thought there would be nothing doing for a while up here; so he went

"His scalp was in the wild dog's maw,
The hair was tangled round his jaw."

He had fallen there, and perished probably unknown to his comrades.

Glorious war confers honours, and other not much *gilded* laurels to the few ; but it distributes obscurity and oblivion to the many.

"Well, you fellows," cried Crumbs, whose nature was of a practical turn, and little imbued by sentiment. "What shall I do with it? Not much use to the original owner, and I can't see it's any more to the finder. We'd have given him decent burial, if possible ; but one don't know what to do with a skull. I'll take it home with me and keep it as a relic of the Valley of the Tchernaya," and Crumbs dismounted, and placed the skull in his haversack. "It's time we pushed for camp, though, so come along, and let us see if those ponies of yours can keep alongside The Uncle ;" saying which Crumbs led the way to "the front" at a smart canter.

"Captain Herries for the advanced covering party," was announced by an orderly corporal, on their arrival in camp. So snatching a hasty dinner, Herries departed for "the ditches," leaving Jack and Crumbs to enjoy a more elaborate meal, and talk over "the good thing" in mokes, till the "gurrie" rang out midnight.

* * * * *

The moon shimmers as bright over the Black Sea this night, as the sun during the day had shone over the dark and sluggish waters of the Tchernaya. Slightly pitching and rolling, for there is a subsiding swell still left from a recent gale on those turbulent waters, a steam transport is making her way through the glittering sea to Constantinople, or, to speak more correctly, Scutari.

She carries a melancholy cargo of worn-out, broken-down humanity. A feeder, in short, to the insatiable maw of the great grim Scutari Hospital. A building over which—till Miss

Nightingale's noble efforts, conjoined with the tardily recognised dictum that one doctor was not equal to the work of twenty—might have been inscribed Dante's awful line

"Those who enter here, leave all hope behind."

It was the fashion in those days to abuse the Medical and Commissariat Staffs. Having cut these corps down to their minimum in time of peace, we were surprised to find them unequal to the emergency of war. It was suddenly discovered that fifty thousand men, whom you can neither fight at once, or more, were but so much live-lumber, that to feed them required an extensive organisation. Able men were reviled because they did not happen to be twenty able men a-piece, and were consequently unable to cope with the work thrust upon them.

We are approaching the ancient Athenians in our customs of late years, and ostracism follows quick upon failure; when things go wrong, retribution must come speedily on some one, or the nation is not content. If the authorities do not provide a scape-goat, Exeter Hall is apt to select one, with about as much judgment as charity. As Mr. Carlyle says, "safer to humour the mob than repress them with the rope about your neck." A maxim which Colonial governors and soldiers will do well to reflect on.

There had been a sharp skirmish round Eupatoria, and it was the wounded of that struggle that the steamer was conveying to Scutari. The Englishman and the Osmanli lay side by side in their blood-stained bandages. The Russian had been beaten back, but he had left his mark as that crowded ship too clearly testified. They were grim foemen those Russians, and if they did not always succeed, they never yielded without a stern tenacious struggle. The almost forlorn hope of the Tchernaya was a specimen of this, where they were shot down in scores, still awaiting orders to retire from officers already numbered with the dead.

Tramping up and down the deck in the glorious moonlight, anon looking over the side to watch the showers of phosphoric light, which the vessel threw up in her rapid course, were Cis Langton and the doctor in charge of the invalids. Cis had been up to Kertch in the interests of the Journal which he represented, as likely to furnish more interesting matter than the Camp before Sebastopol could afford in the present state of apparent stagnation.

"You've had a busy day of it, doctor," said Cis.

"Yes—there's several of them, though, poor fellows, who won't trouble anybody much longer."

"Why, I thought we left all the hopeless cases behind us?"

"So we did, all those actually hopeless then; but many of these are hopeless now. It is hard to predicate of a gun-shot wound what the chances are. Some bear the shock at first so wonderfully, you think they will do well. It is only after three or four days they begin to sink, and that exhaustion, we so much dread, sets in. Others who seemed prostrated at first, rally wonderfully when you once get their nervous system composed."

"Some, of course, have more stamina than others."

"Yes: then some never lose heart, while others seem to give it at once. Pluck pulls a good many through, whose chances, otherwise, are, to say the least of them, indifferent."

"What a night it is," remarked Langton, after a short silence as he emitted a huge puff of tobacco smoke from under his thick moustache.

"Glorious! though I wish there was a little less motion, on account of those poor patients of mine."

"Yes, some of those poor fellows, I suppose, have little chance of recovery. What do you think of that dark fellow's case?"

"You mean the officer who got so horribly cut about in that affair with the Cossacks the other night?"

"Yes, one of the Turkish Contingent, isn't he?"

"Yes ; he's a Major Delpré, and I hear distinguished himself greatly in that brush. His is as bad a case as I have. I won't bother you with technicalities, but he's cut all to ribbons, and has got no less than seven wounds, two of which might kill any man. It's my belief that most men would have sunk already under the injuries he has sustained, but there's such unflinching pluck in that man, that it is just barely possible he might recover. He stood the amputation of his leg wonderfully, taken off just below the knee, bone smashed to atoms. All he said was :

" 'I've been broke and mended, steeple-chasing, a good many times, doctor, but I fancy the results of a grape shot are not so

it won't, the sooner it goes the better. Don't waste my strength in attempting to save it.' "

"Well, but if he has borne this so well, why shouldn't he pull through ?"

"Because, to say nothing of flesh wounds, which are all taking it out of him, more or less, he will have, unless I am fortunately wrong in my opinion, to lose his left arm besides. They couldn't take it off up there. A man can't stand two such operations simultaneously—very little chance indeed of his ever showing stamina to go through the second. At Scutari they will judge whether it's inflicting useless pain, or whether he has a chance. From the man's great nerve, I should think they will try, as I fancy mortification must result if they do not. But of course it is asking a tremendous thing of a man's constitution, more especially so knocked about as he is besides, to stand the shock of two such operations. Did you ever hear of him before ?"

"Yes : I have seen him some few times as a gentleman rider in England, but know nothing about him. I was interested in him from the pluck and patience with which he bore his hurts, poor fellow."

down to Constantinople, and from thence, I fancy, went on somehow to Kertch. I, amongst others, was to write him word to Misseri's when we looked like another move, and I scribbled a line to him the other day, to say I thought there would be a row here shortly. I don't think the French fellows will stand that Mamelon in their front much longer, and one of the Engineers told me the other day, whenever they made up their minds to have that, we were bound to take the Quarries. Stands pretty well to reason, we shall try for both places simultaneously."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Herries, "and it will be a stiffish night's business, too, on both sides. To do them justice, those Russians make us fight hard for every yard of ground we get."

"Yes. Halloa, Crumbs! what the devil are you looking for? What's the matter? What have you lost?"

"Nothing. Don't you recollect riding down here a month ago, when it was barely as safe as it is now, and finding those fragments of a Russian dragoon about here? Nothing left of him much, poor beggar! but the skull and some of his jacket, which told us what he had been. Evidently one of those who fell on the Balaklava day. I was trying to find the place, it's somewhere hereabouts."

"Yes, only the grass has grown so, since. You will never find it now."

Crumbs still kept walking his pony round and round, and suddenly exclaimed, "Shan't I? look here!"

Herries and Travers walked their ponies to the spot. Yes, there it was, with a few fragments of the laced jacket, a few buttons, and a few scattered bones—preaching as grim a sermon as ever Yorick preached to Hamlet. There were men and women, perchance, far away over the great Russian steppes, who had shed many a tear, felt many a pang, when the fatal return of "missing" after the great battle of Balaklava had come to their ears. Some one, perhaps, still clung to the hope that he was but a prisoner, though

For, though the name of Delpré brought no memories to Langton, Cis's name recalled to his recollection one of the darkest pages in his somewhat dark career. Yes, there had been a time when he had known that name only too well. He had never, to his knowledge, seen Langton before ; but he knew now well who it was that was "doing the Samaritan" to him daily.

Could he bear it? Yes ; with a peculiarity sometimes seen in such cases, nothing seemed to soothe Delpré more than attentions from the man he had so deeply injured. Whether he thought forgiveness seemed conveyed in them by their unconscious bestower, I can't say, but so it was. Delpré did not deceive himself with regard to his chances of recovery. He was anything but blind to the serious nature of his injuries, and would probably have sneeringly described his situation as "a hundred to one chance." Nevertheless, he and Langton were great friends when they landed at Scutari, and when Cis bade him "good-bye," to betake himself to Misseri's Hotel at Pera, it was with a speedy promise of coming over to see him in the big Scutari Hospital.

* * * * *

The same moon that shone so bright o'er the still heaving bosom of the restless Euxine, flashed its pale rays over a small terrace at Fulham. At an open window there, sat Breezie Langton, gazing out into the moonlight with her large, serious eyes ; her light muslin draperies almost blended with the light curtains. Her face was rather pale, and looked all too grave for that of the laughter-loving girl of little more than a year ago. You must remember the whole bank of her affections was staked on that Crimean struggle. Her lover, and he who stood to her in the light of a father, were both engaged therein. Her adopted father might not be engaged in the actual strife, but did not every mail record fearful gaps in the ranks of the non-combatants. The fatality of shot, shell, and steel accounts for but a small percentage, after all, of those who perish in a

great campaign. Disease and exposure are much more deadly. A reporter to a large army, in pursuit of his avocation, undergoes a great deal more hard work than the world in general gives him credit for, and not a few of them have undergone their baptism of fire pretty smartly.

Poor Breezie ! she was doomed to sit and wait ; to watch and weep ; to tremble at every mail, while "Second Editions with Glorious Victory," made her heart stand still. The bells rang out their jubilant tones, and the cannon thundered salutes ; but many a fond woman's heart turned sick at those sounds, as she thought how it might have fared with those she loved in that far away land on that day of glory. The feverish waiting till the dark list of killed and wounded was published, was hard to bear.

Breezie, too, had few friends to sympathise with her. Laura Lyttlereck was kindness itself, so was Belle ; but of late, Belle had been absorbed in her own troubles, so Breezie led her lonely life as she best might—nothing left her but to pray and hope.

"Absurd !" she murmured to herself, as she rose from the window. "I am weak and foolish. I grow nervous, living here so much alone. Yet I can't help feeling as if sorrow was coming upon me ere long. As Jack says, I am making but a bad attempt to fit myself for a soldier's wife. His last letter was cheery enough, too."

Here she took it from her bosom, and read it for the fiftieth time.

"Don't be nervous about me, my darling, or your father either. We are both in the rudest of health and highest of spirits, and shall, perhaps, return home such eminent people, you will be almost shy about speaking to us. Why fret yourself about casualties, which will, probably, never occur ? I have no intention of getting shot, with a sweet wife waiting for me in England. I'll admit, getting a little wounded would

be nice. It would be so charming to let you in for all the trouble of nursing me ; and what an exacting patient I should become. If he would but do it dexterously, I could find it in my heart to pay a Russian to shoot me. There, Breezie, I have no time to write more nonsense. You must learn to be a soldier's wife, dearest. Quite time enough to be frightened, when I write to say I'm hurt, and don't like it. Once more, good-bye, darling, &c., &c."

"Ah !" she said, with a smile, "it would be too good luck. If they would send him home just a little wounded. No, I must still wait and hope, I suppose ; but oh ! this weary waiting ! I've half a mind to go to my aunt's at Hitchin for a few days. One gets the news there almost as soon as in London. It would be a change, and I could get Laura to telegraph, if there was anything of importance."

She closed the window, and took a few turns up and down the little drawing-room ; peused for a moment opposite her easel, upon which rested a half-finished water-colour.

"And that should have been finished," she murmured. "Don't I know we shall be poor when we marry ? and didn't I vow to make use of the little talent I have in this way to help a little ? I have been lucky, too, with the few I have sold. Jack, my dearest, if you were but safe back again, how I could paint !"

She stopped, for her heart smote her that she had expressed no anxiety about her father all this time.

"Ungrateful that I am ! Yes, I must have him back safe too, before I'm happy. Well, I'll go to bed ;" and Breezie turned out the lamp.

Our "Three Years" are drawing to an end. As in most three years in men's lives, changes have come fast. Who can tell what combinations this kaleidoscope, we call life, may present at the end of any three years ? Little thought many a gay looker-on at the Epsom triumph of "*West Australian*," that

his first knowledge of what had won the Derby in Fifty-five would be the curt announcement at the bottom of General Orders, bearing date, Camp before Sebastopol, "The Derby was won by 'Wild Dayrell.'"

CHAPTER XXXI.

SCUTARI HOSPITAL.

THE wind sighs softly through the vast grove of cypresses that constitute the great Scutari Cemetery, as if whispering lovingly to the countless Osmauli who lie below. A wonderful place to muse and loiter in is that vast grave-yard, with its thousands of broken crumbling tombs and head-stones. The queer Turkish characters, the roughly carved turbans, the dark, column-looking cypresses, and, above all, the vast extent of the place strike upon the imagination, and make one feel the great city on the other side has produced its dead facsimile upon this. The huge troops of gaunt savage-looking dogs prowl about and lope off amongst the grave-stones like so many evil spirits, while here and there you come upon one gaunter, greyer, and bigger than his fellows, as if doubly accursed; vicious brutes they are, too, when nightfall gives them courage, for they resemble the refuse humanity on the other side, and grow bold with darkness. In the broad daylight, they view the stone in the hand of the Anglo-Saxon with as much awe as the Philistines felt for the sling of David, while one crack of a revolver suffices to send them yelping away to remote haunts. For more than a mile, if memory serves me right, much nearer two, you may wander through cypresses and broken grave-stones. Fit subject for an elegy, though it has not yet been sung.

It is a gala day, and the Turkish ladies have congregated thick as their London sisters for a botanical fête. I am afraid,

though, the dames of the English metropolis would hardly appreciate a gathering conducted on similar principles. Cavaliers there are none. On a grassy common at the head of the Cemetery, and running between that and the great hospital (a barrack till the exigencies of the present struggle transformed it), are assembled several hundred women, apparently for purposes of conversation, coffee drinking, and sweetmeat eating. A perfect Babel of conversation seems to be going on to uninitiated ears. I would I could say it was as musical as women's voices should be; but truth compels me to admit that they are rather shrill in their notes, and that high notes predominate. It is a pretty sight, however, the mantles are all of the brightest colours. Orange, blue, and purple are, perhaps, most popular, though there is not a colour in the rainbow unrepresented. Through the thin muslin yashmack you see the dark eyes flash and sparkle, no more dismayed at the admiration of the wandering Frank than women about the world generally. Eyes are the strong point of all Orientals; their complexions are generally pasty, perhaps they consume more sweetmeats than are good for them. Whether they have figures or not, their dress precludes any possibility of ascertaining; and what woman could possibly walk who had spent her life in slippers down at heel—to be sure, they never do walk, and perhaps hardly look upon themselves as created for such a purpose.

Looking lazily on at all this, lounged Cis Langton. He had seen it all before, so that it was no novelty to him; but it made up a pretty enough picture that summer evening. The picturesque costumes, with their brilliant colouring moving over the grassy carpet, with the dark cypress grove for a background, was the very thing for an idle man's eye to revel in as he smoked his cigar.

"And not a soul amongst the whole of them according to Mahometan doctrine, or a mind according to our more enlightened creed," mused Cis. "Well, they seem very happy without either, though they doubtless enjoy their jealousies

and heart-burnings like other people. I am not quite clear there is not a good deal of happiness in total ignorance, as long as you keep it of a primitive and Arcadian type ; when it takes the form of drunkenness and brutality, it is simply not ignorance, but the first sign of civilization on the unenlightened mind. Yes, I have very little doubt that civilization and the unestimable blessing of an introduction to strong waters, which in modern days always accompanies it, will quite preclude Macaulay's New Zealander taking the seat prophetically assigned to him. The North American Indians have enjoyed the blessing of intercourse with us for some years, and cannot be said to have thriven thereon. Bosh ! what's the use of speculation on future ages ? I wonder, by the way, what they'll say to all this business in nineteen hundred, when they are still paying taxes for it ? About that time they will have perhaps settled why we went to war at all. However, that's not my business. All I have to do is, to let the public know how we carry it on now we've begun. I must go now and see this poor fellow Delpré, then cross the water, and wind up my letter for the mail."

Cis had seen Delpré twice since their passage down. As the doctor on board the transport had predicted, the man's pluck and vitality were such that the medical men had resolved to run the chance of the second operation. He could not possibly live without it, and they thought it was just possible to save him by it.

"Just what I fancied," he replied, when they told him. "I thought it must go. I don't much think I can stand it. I have had a good deal taken out of me already ; but I never played a finking game in this life that I didn't repent it. I suppose there's no chance without it, is there ?"

"Rely upon it we should not suggest such a thing, if it could be averted. If you are to live you must lose that arm, and we can simply trust to your nerve and your excellent constitution to pull you through. It may shorten your life

a few days, it may save it. Without it, your hours are numbered."

"Thanks, Doctor, I like a straightforward statement. Keep me alive if you can, do what you think best. But, recollect, I have a friend over at Pera I must see before I die. Let me know if I am going the wrong way in time for that. I will throw a day or two's life away willingly, for a last talk with him."

Cis entered the Hospital and walked slowly through the long aisles, bordered on each side by what seemed endless beds only too well filled. Sometimes a bandaged head would raise itself from the pillow, and stare after him with a wandering feverish glance, then a pair of lack lustre eyes met his gaze with stony indifference. Here, a quiet, calm, resigned face full of hope and patience—there, one whose twitching lips and restless motion told but too plainly of pain that was hard to bear. A walk through the wards of a hospital is a melancholy sight at any time.

The long passages at Scutari afforded no exception. At the time of which I am now writing, the miserable confusion of early days had disappeared, and if the beds were still crowded, yet quiet, order, and cleanliness reigned throughout. Beyond the extra ghastliness caused by the numerous cases of mutilation inseparable from the hospital of an army in the field, it looked, I fancy, like most other hospitals.

At a small door opening off one of the long passages, Cis tapped gently. It was opened by a medical officer, who, upon seeing Langton, closed it behind him.

"Good morning," said Cis. "Is he so bad then, that you do not wish me to see him?"

"Not quite that; but I want to speak to you before you do see him. I am afraid, poor fellow, there is very little chance of his pulling through; there has been a return of fever since the second operation, and in his exhausted state, that is almost certain to prove fatal. An interview with you will do him no

good ; but, on the other hand, his feverish anxiety to see you for some purpose or other is agitating him to that extent, that I think it will be the less of two evils. Will you allow me to ask you a question or two ?”

“ Certainly,” said Cis, with a blank stare of astonishment.

“ You knew Delpré, I presume, well in former days ?”

“ No—nothing of the kind. I never exchanged a word with him before a week ago on board the transport. I recognised him then as a pretty well-known ‘gentleman rider’ in England. I have taken some interest in turf matters in my day.”

It was now the Doctor’s turn to be astonished.

“ Well, to tell you the truth, Delpré was a little delirious last night, ‘off his head,’ as they say. I was with him part of the time, and in his incoherent ravings, he mixed up your name with some wrong he had done you in early days. I cannot tell you what. But will you bear in mind that I want your visit to be as short and as little exciting as you can make it ? I let you see him, as I have told you, judging it the less of two evils.”

“ I’ll bear what you say in mind, though for the life of me, I cannot fancy there being anything to excite him in seeing me, unless, indeed, under the influence of delirium, he mistakes me for some one else ?”

“ I don’t know. I should doubt it. He mentioned your name distinctly several times.”

The Doctor might also have added a female name as constantly recurring in Delpré’s wanderings ; but he thought it unnecessary.

“ Shall I go in then ?”

“ Yes ; you will find an attendant with him who will wait outside here. I shall not be far off, and he will know where to find me if wanted.”

Cis entered quietly. Delpré was tossing restlessly on his pillow. His dark hair, beard, and moustache only made the pale face more ghastly, while the fierce fever-lit delirious-look-

ing eyes glittered with a light that, to the practised glance, betokened speedy dissolution.

"What nonsense they talk!" he muttered. "Not excite yourself; as if that was in man's hands! Why not tell the sea to be still, as tell me to control this restless mind? I've told them what alone can quiet me—laudanum! they say they're afraid to try it—quiet me for ever, perhaps. If I'd but seen Langton, it's little I'd care if it did. Better to die than live the wretch I am now. Fool that I was to let them touch the arm! I knew it was all over before, useless pain, and I'd have been stronger now. Has that doctor deceived me? He swore he would send for Langton!"

"And Langton is here!" said Cis, in a low voice.

"Then he's kept his word; here, help me round this side, so that I can talk to you."

Cis and the hospital orderly gently moved the wounded man into the required position.

"Wait outside," said Cis, in answer to the requisition of Delpré's eager eyes.

"Yes, Langton," said Delpré, "I wanted to see you much. There was a parson wished to talk to me this morning; but I told him I wanted all my strength, my book I fear is a bad one, but it's too late to hedge—"

"Hush! hush!" said Cis.

"No cant, old fellow, I know I'm going fast; but don't believe lives like mine are made white by crying over them during their last eight-and-forty hours. Stop," he said, as he saw Cis about to speak, "give me some of that drink there, it's a stimulant, and I want it."

Cis lifted the tumbler to his lips.

"Thanks, now don't interrupt me more than you can help. My talking's nearly over in this world; you've been a friend to me the last few days, and it's years," he said bitterly, "since Ralph Delpré has known what a friend was."

"Very little, I'm sorry to say, that I have been able to do for

"Yes, he is about as plucky and cynical a patient as ever I had."

"How do you mean?" inquired Cis.

"Well, he seldom speaks without a sneer, and those keen dark eyes of his seem to read me like a book. His talk, too, is garnished always with turf metaphors, which I very often don't understand, and he has a low mocking tongue that's bad to listen to. I was speaking cheerily to him this morning about himself, when he interrupted me with:

" 'You are trying to rig the market with me, doctor; you're a good fellow, have done all you know, and been very kind to me. Dare say you are to most of us; but I know I've got to give away a deal more weight yet.' Here he motioned to his wounded arm. 'It will be a very close thing, and win or lose, doctor, I'm grateful to you. No dead heats either,' he muttered, 'in this race. Good bye, I'm going to try and sleep.'"

"Well, it's about time to turn in, so good night;" and Cis sought his shake down, which was of the roughest, all accommodation being reserved for the sick and wounded.

Delpré's story had roused a strange interest in Cis, and during the few remaining hours they remained on board together, he paid great attention to the wounded man. Little did he think that his good offices were bestowed on the man who had marred his life. That the mutilated being, to whose parched lips he held the tepid lemonade, had crushed the spirit out of his early ambition, and left him the driftless, purposeless man he was. Dead to all his youthful dreams of fame, his profession abandoned, Cis had for years written only to live. He might have made a name in that career, but a facile writer, he reeled off his articles as occasions required, and troubled himself little about his reputation, as long as his work brought him the required money.

And what did Delpré think? A strange glitter came into his feverish eyes, when he found out the name of the man who had constituted himself his nurse on that Euxine passage.

able story before I die, which has made me so anxious to see you. I wronged her deeply—with the exception that I did marry her, as deeply as man can wrong woman."

"Stop! it's no time to talk bitterly to a man whose hours may be already numbered."

"Are!" murmured Delpré.

"But," continued Cis, not heeding the interruption, "you killed her. God forgive me, I'll try not to think of how I have ever meant to stand face to face with him who bereft her of reason, and left life a blank to me—what I had vowed should come to pass if ever in this world I met with poor Lucy's destroyer. Whether it pleases heaven to spare you or not, no human hand could ever be lifted against you now."

"You'd have killed me, if you could?" inquired Delpré, with a fierce gleam of his dark eyes.

"Don't ask me! though why shouldn't you know; there was a time in the first delirium of that grief, when I'd have shot you like a dog, and little recked what came of it. I don't think for years afterwards I would have even given you a chance for your life."

Delpré's eyes flashed again. There was something in Cis's concentrated hate and thirst for vengeance, that suited well with his own cynical, restless, and vindictive temperament.

"And you'd have been right," he said in a low voice; "but hear my story. Right, perhaps, in avenging her wrongs; your own you would have been mistaken about. Listen! That summer of thirty-four I came down to South Wales, principally to get out of the way of my creditors. Two years in the Guards, during which I had graduated in turf and every other description of gambling, had about finished me. Like most beginners, I had paid pretty dearly for my initiation. My debts were numberless; but not being of age, I could not of course be touched legally on that score, still creditors can make town unpleasant if they can't actually touch you, whilst unsettled

play accounts and unmet engagements at Tattersall's had left the London world no place for me to show my face in. My friends had come to the rescue. I was to be exchanged to an Indian Regiment, and everything settled, but the family solicitors thought it would conduce very much to an easier arrangement with the Jews, if I could be got out of the country before I came of age. It became a fine point whether the exchange could be completed in time, as I wanted but little of my majority, and these matters are sometimes a good while in hand. Yes, a couple of months there would have altered this life a good deal to two or three people." Delpré paused, and sank back on his pillow. Cis regarded him with the same dogged silence he had maintained since the beginning; all the doctor's directions had vanished from his mind. He was thinking only of the past, and burning with impatience to hear Delpré's story.

"Well," he continued, after a minute or two's silence, "you can fancy what that monotonous existence was to me, fresh from the whirl of London life, and accustomed to the excitement of constant gambling. I felt fit to cut my throat, and inspired with the devil's own capabilities for mischief. Chance threw me a little into society, and at a small picnic I first met Lucy Rawson. No need to tell you what a pretty girl she was. Scarcely less to tell you, that as the prettiest girl there, I paid her particular attention."

Cis shivered; he had but half buried his dead love.

"Langton, I won't say forgive me; but believe me I wish to wound you as little as I can. God forgive me! I wish only to tell you a true story."

"Go on," muttered Cis, "I can bear it all now, and would know the truth."

"She was shy at first, but I may say it now without vanity, I was voted a good-looking guardsman in those days, and I could soon see it flattered her vanity to have me numbered as an admirer in her train. I tell you fairly, I was not the only

play according to her niece. She threw no obstacles in my way, and the London drifted rapidly on. My friends had my boyhood I had never been accustomed to place no restraint on my passions. I had always at least for all I coveted; I was not going to stop now. I went with in love with Lucy Rawson, and did all I knew to win I came off at she had little money; that my own position was could be, I never thought an instant. What was to become of jority, she did marry, I never reflected. And, to do Lucy justice, Yes, a thought as winning her without marriage did cross good rain, it died away almost before it was formed." Again back paused. Langton's face was set hard and stern. No one siler could read the expression better than Delpré. He honoured It suited his own temper. He felt that had he been other than he was, he would have been struck down ere he had told his story thus far, and that it would have been no bloodless quarrel between those two.

"Give me a glass of that champagne," at last said Delpré, breaking silence. "I am allowed to drink as much as I like now of that. Pretty sure sign of what the doctors think of my chance."

Cis poured out, and handed him the wine.

"Go on," he said, between his teeth, "I must hear the whole of it now. They said something about not exciting you; but if you have strength to tell it I must know all. I'd have lain as you do now willingly enough in those days, when life seemed all a dreary waste, and I had nothing left to hope for."

"Don't think of me. A few hours of life more or less makes little difference. I owe you some atonement, and if I can make that and shorten my own sufferings at the same time, why who can say it is not good hedging?" and Delpré laughed bitterly. "Well," he continued, "there is not much more to tell, fortunately, perhaps, or I would hardly last to relate it. Reckless of everything, I pressed Lucy to run away with me. She hesitated for some days; but at last not daring to cut the

Gordian knot of her engagement with you in any other way, she consented. An appeal to her father, I pointed out under the circumstances, could only lead to her recall home. We fled, and a few days afterwards were married at a small parish church some fifty miles off. I had taken a cottage in the place, and there we lived for little more than a month. In the first intoxication of my success, I had forgotten all about my desperate situation.

“ ‘The world forgetting, by the world forgot,’

those few sunshiny weeks slipped away rapidly. Our eyes were barely beginning to open. We had but just begun the contemplation of what was to become of us ; I was but just beginning to wake to the consciousness that all my previous escapades had been light compared to this—while Lucy, to whom I had disclosed something of my position, though but partially comprehending it, had at last discovered that her future life was not destined to be a bed of roses, and that her husband's temper was not quite so even as she supposed.

“ At this juncture, to my astonishment, I was honoured by a visitor. In short, the family lawyer, who was striving to make some compromise with regard to my affairs, arrived at the cottage. His business was urgent. I was to be in the next gazette exchanged to the —th in India. My inquiry as to how the devil he found me out? he met with—

“ ‘Not so very difficult as you suppose. Moreover, I am not the only man who has discovered your retreat. In this charming seclusion it may have escaped you that you came of age some fortnight ago ; but ‘the tribes’ have made no such oversight. Issachar Ben Israel has already loosed his war dogs. To drop metaphor, I left the emissaries of Simeon and Co. last night at Carmarthen, a little at fault as to your actual whereabouts—a doubt, which, depend upon it, a very few hours will unravel. Your passage is taken in the *Ararat* ; she sails in forty-eight hours, and you must sail in her. Even that

is quite as long as you will be able to evade Simeon's ban dogs. Once in his hands, you destroy all hopes of compromise. You must leave this, with me, to-morrow, at daybreak. You can, I hope, give me some sort of bed and something to eat.'

"I readily promised the latter, but vainly demurred to leaving.

"The lawyer was inexorable; he dwelt upon my liabilities, quoted the sternest directions from my family, and finally threatened to abandon me to my fate, if I refused to be guided by him. He dined with us, was extremely polite to Lucy, as any man of the world would have been, though I could see plainly he had not the remotest idea that she was my wife. I caught a half smile as he glanced at her wedding-ring. He had probably seen a good many fictitious rings of that description in his time, and I had not the moral courage to deceive him. We sat far into the night; I vainly protesting the impossibility of my departure; he, cool and inexorable as fate. The one plea of leaving my wife so suddenly I never had courage to advance.

"I yielded. By daybreak next morning I was on my way, leaving a few lines for Lucy on her dressing-table, to the effect that I was called away suddenly for two or three days on business. I also wrote to Mr. Rawson, avowing my marriage, my desperate situation, my departure for India, and entreating him to come to his daughter and shelter her, till I could send for her to join me out there; giving him also my future address, and requesting he would write to me."

"Coward!" hissed Cis. "You left that unhappy girl to her fate! It is well we did not meet sooner!"

Delpré's face flushed, as he rejoined bitterly:

"A few short weeks ago, and no man would have said that to me. You have it all your own way now."

Cis coloured. "You are right," he said; "forgive me. But," he continued, mournfully; "you don't know—such as you

can't know—how I loved and how I suffered. Let me hear the rest."

"There's little more to tell. Give me something more to drink. No—not champagne—that ammonia stuff is better. Thanks. I never received a line from either Rawson or Lucy. Three years elapsed before I was able to return from India—though I had written two or three times, no answer ever reached me. On my return to England, I went down to South Wales, only to discover that Rawson had long left the country, and that my wife had disappeared with him. Lucy's aunt could tell me nothing more, than the great scandal which had been raised by Rawson *versus* Rawson. Her brother had left the country and she had never heard from him since. I set every inquiry on foot, and after some months, attracted, I suppose, by some of my many advertisements in the papers, I received a letter without date or signature, but in Rawson's handwriting, and bearing a Prussian post-mark, which informed me that my wife had died in such an asylum, was buried close by, and that I might verify these particulars for myself. The letter was short and bitter in the extreme. I could hardly expect otherwise, and yet, Langton,"—and Delpré's voice softened,—“was it all my fault?”

“Yes!” said Cis, sternly. His old romantic ideal of Lucy still remained enshrined in his heart. Loyal to his old love. Still he refused to believe she was the light, weak coquette she had been in reality. “Yes!” he reiterated, fiercely, “what right had you to snatch a weak timid girl from her home, her friends, her betrothed; to throw her on one side as soon as your desperate circumstances compelled you? You might have known the result to one so fair, so fragile as she.” And Cis covered his face with his hand, and saw once more before him the fair girlish face, with its blue eyes and soft sunny tresses, that had blighted his life and caused him so much misery.

“I have done,” said Delpré, “beyond that I went down,

stood by her grave, and found that you had been with her when she died. I have no more to tell," and he sank back exhausted. "I have committed, I suppose, as much ill as most men in my time; but somehow, poor Lucy's fate comes home to me more than anything else. Langton," he continued, faintly; "you've been kind to me lately. I should like to hear you say you forgive me?"

"Forgive you!" said Cis. "I don't pretend to be a very good Christian, and I swore when poor Lucy died in my arms, that forgiveness should be the last thing I would think of, if ever I met her destroyer. My dream of vengeance is over. It's not in my nature to say it heartily; but as far as I can say it, I do forgive you."

A smile flickered on Delpré's lips, and the dark eyes lit up for a moment. Even then he recognised a nature somewhat akin to his own, and perhaps liked Langton all the better for his half-sullen forgiveness.

"Thanks," he said, extending his one wan, feeble hand; "and good-bye, I can't talk any more now. Come and see me to-morrow—it will be the last time."

"One more question."

"Ask it to-morrow," and Delpré turned his face away.

Cis moved silently to the door. The Doctor met him on the threshold.

"Mr. Langton, have you kept your promise?" he enquired; but Cis passed him like a man in a dream.

When next he saw Delpré he was beyond the reach of questioning, his face set, pale, calm, and immovable in death. Langton and the Doctor alone followed him to his last resting place in the Scutari graveyard.

Whether he knew that he had a daughter, could now be no longer ascertained; but it seemed unlikely that he had ever been aware of it.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CRUMBS COMES OF AGE.

THE siege progresses. The capitals of Europe anxiously await telegrams from the Crimea. Funds and *rentes* fluctuate with every report. The besiegers begin once more to speculate on seeing the inside of the grim fortress they have gazed on so many months. Days of plenty and sunshine have succeeded to these terrible days of famine and frost. There is a good deal in what Hugo calls "a satisfied intestine." The units of the great army wind their way to the trenches and destiny, with a far livelier and more inspirited step than that of some few weeks ago. If we are predestined to be shot, let us at all events not be shot fasting. "*Dum vivimus vivamus*," and there was but little of that in the drear winter months.

It is but little past seven in the morning, and the early June sun already glares fiercely down on the white tents that stretch far away across the plateau, wearying the eye as some one humorously observed at the time, with their 'monotonous architecture.' The piled arms glitter in the sunlight, and the crossed colours droop drowsily in front of the quarter guard. Soldiers, in their shirt-sleeves, are busy preparing breakfast, cleaning their accoutrements, or indulging in a morning-pipe, with a running accompaniment of chaff on their more active comrades' proceedings.

Midst the officers' tents as yet, there is hardly as much sign of life, though from one of which the flap is thrown open, comes a mixture of prose and poetry that might arrest one's attention.

"Jim, Jim!" exclaims a voice, "where the devil are my boots—and where the devil are you? and,

" 'Tis all amongst the ditches,
'Tis there we take our ease;
Yes, all amongst the ditches
Midst heat, and dust, and fleas."

"Here you," to a passing soldier. "Just sing out to number three company for Jim Delany. Fellow never is here when I want him."

"One day is like another,
Only not so fine,
And ration rum is very
Poor substitute for wine.
Salt pork they'll never make me
Think nice as Easter lamb;
Yet they say we should be grateful,
That still here, 'still we am,'
Yes, all amongst the ditches."

"Shut up, you noisy young villain," roared a voice from an adjoining tent. "If you can't sleep yourself, let other people remain unconscious, will you?"

The warbler stepped from his tent in slippers and shirt-sleeves, and with mock gravity, addressing the tent from which the voice had proceeded, replied—

"Captain Travers, I pardon the rudeness of your remark, in consideration of the debasing influences to which this unfortunate and protracted struggle has subjected you. But the man who would crush the spirit of ingenuous youth, when saluting from the fulness of his heart the first blush of the day of his nativity with a burst of melody, is unworthy of the name of a Christian, and can only be aroused to a sense of his demoralization by the immediate application of a wet sponge." At the termination of which tremendous harangue, Crumbs, for he it was, snatched open the flap of the adjoining tent, and hurled a dripping sponge into the interior.

Crumbs had barely time to put some twenty yards between himself and the tent door, ere Jack Travers bounded out in his shirt, and a heavy shooting boot whizzed through the air in pursuit. The scrimmage brought out various inhabitants of the neighbouring canvas, in every description of *deshabille*. There being no ladies in the vicinity, trousers were not looked upon as a necessity, and after a considerable amount of chaff, a

truce was proclaimed, and the company generally proceeded with an *al fresco* toilet.

"Forgot it was your birthday, Crumbs. Many happy returns of the day," said Jack. "By the way, you give a lot of us a feed at Kamiesch, don't you?"

"Yes. It was only my anxiety regarding your appetite, led me to terminate your peaceful slumbers so abruptly. Langton and Coningsby Clarke are to meet us there at the big restaurant at four, we'll dine about five, and shall have a jolly ride home in the evening."

"Good, my son. A very pretty programme for a hot day, and this looks like a piper. What time do we start?"

"Must be here soon after two. It'll be a hottish ride, we can't help that. It won't signify, only makes fellows more thirsty—cooler than trenches, any how."

"Yes, and a deal pleasanter. All right. By Jove, there goes the parade bugle," and Jack hurried away.

Half-past two saw some six or eight of Crumbs' particular chums mounted on their Turkish ponies, and then the party set out on their ride.

"Niceish thing of yours, that chestnut, Crumbs," said Jack, mischievously, as they jogged along. "Pity she can't jump."

Any imputation on his horse flesh in public, was a certain "rise" out of Rolls. In confidence, he might admit their weak points, but in public never. He was riding the same chestnut that had given him such a "cropper" in the dog-hunt. But though he had owned to her being an indifferent performer across country, in the easy *abandon* of that afternoon on the Tchernaya, he could not submit to such a public attack on any animal he owned.

"Not jump!" he said, "oh, she was a little awkward at first, raw, you know, but she jumps like a bird now."

"Don't much believe in these sudden conversions, unless I see them proved," retorted Jack. "Let's see you put her over something."

"So you shall directly we come to anything. There's nothing to try her at here."

They were riding through the Naval Brigade Camp during the above colloquy.

"Nonsense," said Jack, "there's a very pretty jump, if she is as handy as you say she is," and he pointed to a *trute abris*, standing a few yards to their right. "That's the sort of thing to try a really clever horse."

"Oh, come now, you don't mean to call that a fair jump?"

"Well, perhaps, not for a pony like yours. Pretty bit of practice for anything that knows its business."

"I don't call it a fair test, mind you; but if you think my pony can't hop over that, you're confoundedly mistaken," and Crumbs, who was rather piqued at the depreciation of his nag, turned her a few yards back, and then brought her down to the *tente abris* at a smart canter.

A touch of the spur, and a slight lift of the rein, and the chestnut rose gallantly, crashed her hind legs through the ridge pole, and landed safely on the other side, leaving a perfect chaos behind her. The tent levelled to the ground, having resolved itself into a confused heap of canvas and cordage. Roars of laughter from some lounging sailors greeted this feat, while from beneath the ruins suddenly poured forth, in deepest base, a torrent of the most nervous and forcible Anglo-Saxon that human ear ever encountered. The fallen canvas writhed as if in convulsions for a few moments, and then emitted a bronzed black-bearded physiognomy, quickly followed by a stalwart body, the proprietor of which could be hardly accused of not speaking his mind plainly.

"Halloa, my man," cried the unabashed Crumbs, "sorry I disturbed your slumbers; didn't know there was anybody inside when I jumped it. Here's half-a-crown to drink my health, and your own, too."

The sailor stared, ceased his anathemas, scratched his head,

pocketed the half-a-crown, and cast a bewildered look at his wretched habitation.

"D—mme, if I understand it all," he muttered. "What he——et cetera's up?"

"Well, your tent is not," laughed Travers.

"Can't you see, you dumb-foozled old idiot, the gen'leman's practising for the races. What business had you to be asleep under that old awning, when quality wants to try their horses jumping over it," said one of his grinning mates.

"What the blazes—you don't mean to say he jumped his horse over it?"

"In course I do, and if it hadn't been for your d—d snoring, which'd a frightened an alligator, let alone a horse, the gen'leman would a cleared it well enough."

"D'ye mean he jumped it! Hold on, your honour, wait till I rig the cussed thing up, and let's see you do it again."

"Aye, aye, that's your sort," cried two or three of the lounging lookers-on. "It won't take us a minute, yer honour. Have another shy at it."

In almost less time the tent was again pitched, and thus adjured, Crumbs once more took the chestnut over, crashing through the ridge-pole as before. The sailors were delighted, and none more so than the strong-languaged proprietor; and it was not till he had performed the feat twice, no great difficulty with a steady horse, that Crumbs was allowed to proceed; a hearty cheer heralding his departure.

What a ride to Kamiesch that was! the stone walls that were "larked" over with more or less grief. The sprint races that

pony. The forming in line to "do" a cavalry charge, in which some were run away with, some out-paced, and some floored by unexpected obstacles. Then an unwary dog was sighted, and hunted as far as he could by any possibility be driven towards Kamiesch; then somebody sang a song, and everybody sang

the chorus he liked best to it, without any regard for the original singer, and then they burst out into indefinite cheering, like so many school-boys broke loose for the day.

At last, hot, tired and dusty, with rather beaten ponies, they arrived considerably after time at their destination. Langton and Coningsby Clarke, who had ridden over from Balaklava together, were quietly smoking in front of the restaurant as they rode up.

"How do, Crumbs?" said Coningsby. "How are you, Jack? Why, you fellows look as if you had started late and hadn't got here in time. What's been the matter?"

"All Herries," said Jack, "thinking we could turn that last dog; brute ran like a greyhound, and has made the Bastion de Mats by this, I should think. How are you, Langton? Heard you were back from Scutari, but haven't had a day to look you up as yet."

"I suppose not; you must be getting pretty busy at the front, if one may judge from what one hears? I don't think the French mean to be out of the Mamelon much longer, and I fancy our people will think it right to have the Quarries at the same time. I only got back last Friday."

"What from your reiving and raiding at Kertch?"

"Well, I stopped ten days or so at Constantinople, and got your letter there, for which accept my acknowledgments."

"And how are you, Coningsby? How do the horse soldiers get on?"

"Suppose I ought to say swimmingly. We've plenty to eat, plenty to drink, and nothing to do. Can't see that we ever shall have anything to do again, till you people have done with Sebastopol. They might as well let us go home for Goodwood."

"Here, *garçon, garçon!*" vociferated Crumbs. "Everything to drink in the house! *Apportez moi quelque chose à boire*; when I say *quelque chose*, I mean everything. Here, tell him, some of you fellows who can patter the lingo—fool don't seem

to understand me ! Everything cold and drinkable, bar water, the place contains."

Some Samaritan, whose throat was as parched, but whose French was more fluent, instantly complied with Crumbs' request.

"About dinner time," said Crumbs, as he finished a huge jorum of something frigid. "Just wait till we get the ponies all squared up, and then we'll to business," with which he disappeared into the house.

Queer houses were those restaurants, long, low, wooden sheds, divided into a number of compartments, with furniture of the roughest. Rude deal tables and chairs ; napery not of the cleanest or finest ; plates and dishes of all sorts of patterns ; glasses of every variety ; cruet-stands of the usual common tavern kind ; forks and spoons of steel and Britannia metal. But for all that, they turned out a decent dinner, or, at all events, what seemed one to men accustomed to camp rations, and gifted with vigorous appetites. Kamiesch itself was Balaklava over again, with, perhaps, a little less mud, and a little more regularity in its laying out. In the present fine weather, the mud had transformed itself into dust, and on that score, there was little to choose between the two places.

"Come along, food's ready," cried Crumbs, from the interior. "Take the bottom, please, Herries, and do preserve a little order, if you can. Don't let Travers sing till we've finished our soup, or 'Sledge' lick the waiter till we have done with him."

A laughing gesture from the accused followed, as they took their places.

"Too hot to eat," quoth Sledge Barton (we have not met him since the fight at Epsom) ; "but the weather seems ordered expressly for drinking."

"That's right, waiter *gargon*, or whatever you are. Run along with the Champagne. Take that water-jug away from Captain Travers' elbow, somebody, please. Some one put some water 'near him early this morning, and it drove him nearly

insane—began throwing his boots about, and all sorts of games."

How is one to describe a scene of this sort? Till photography has extended to word and gesture, I know not. The song that made you roar; the jest or story that convulsed you; how rapid and flat they seem on paper. Christopher North's occur once in a century, and I have even known men fail to catch the aroma of "*The Noctes*." The evening's humour is apt to lose its zest when criticised by daylight. Our pleasant friend of last night shirks his breakfast, swallows oceans of tea, and growls, not wittily, but sulkily, over his toast.

Ah! reader, order something stimulating when you come to scenes like this in a story, and if I might be allowed one more suggestion, it should be, do it twice.

The cloth is drawn; the Babel which attends some half dozen gentlemen talking at once is going on, though it would be libel as yet to suggest "and some of them in strange tongues," too.

"Send the claret along, somebody," cried Crumbs.

"Don't let the jug pace round the board like a cripple,"

as some jolly Ancient or Modern sings, though I don't know who; sensible old cock, whoever he was.

"Drink, drink, laugh and be gay,
Life from its gloom let us sever."

That's your maxim, isn't it, Herries? Suppose you sing us that, just to set us going."

"All right," said Herries, smiling; "though the present company don't apparently want much preaching to on that point. Still, for fear of any backwardness on their part, here goes."

"I saw Delpré down at Scutari," said Langton in an undertone to Travers, during Herries' song.

"Did you? how is he?"

"Dead, poor fellow. He died in the big hospital at Scutari from his wounds. He was in the thick of that scrimmage down at Eupatoria."

"God bless me!" said Jack. "He was no great friend of mine; but I'm sorry he's gone; you saw him in the hospital?"

"Yes, and saw him buried. I have a long story to tell you about it, though not now. Ride over and dine the first day you have to spare. When did you hear from Breezie last?"

"Three days ago. Have you heard from her since?"

"No; you've later news than I. Don't forget to come over, as I want to see you about something that concerns you and her."

"All right; I'll not forget. Bravo, Herries, here's your health."

"Now this is what I call jolly," said Crumbs, he could barely see the end of the table for tobacco smoke. "We should always combine sentiment with melody, and tone the whole down with the best available liquor. With regard to the latter, if anybody can suggest a better tap, we'll try it. In the meantime, it becomes my duty to propose a toast. It's no use talking about love and lovely women out here; there's nobody to make love to. The Minette of Tom Burke exists only in the brain of the author, the genuine article is a coarse avaricious canteen-keeper. The worship of Venus then being out of the question, I am afraid, gentlemen, there's nothing left for us but to 'go in' for glory. I presume honour, glory, loot, and promotion are the principal incentives to our residence in these somewhat out of the way parts; I say out of the way, for you must admit the roads, railways, and hotels are in a shocking state. I'll not remark upon the want of cab-stands, as you all know there is not even a Hansom to be had to take one into Sebastopol, the reason probably so many of us have not as yet been there. Much less will I advert upon the apparent want of hospitality on the part of the natives. It is true, they are always looking us up without any regard to time or season; but whenever we endeavour

to return the compliment, they seem to throw obstacles in the way. Of course it may be, I trust it is, merely their unfortunate manner. I'll say no more, gentlemen, but give you, 'A speedy visit to our friends inside. May we hold our own, and not be overcome by the warmth of our reception.'

A shout of laughter, and numberless hurrahs greeted Crumb's speech; and then a nearly asphyxiated youth of the artillery was called on for a song. After considerable pressure and many misgivings, he burst forth a good octave too high, with:—

"Far, far, from those we love,
With the wintry sky above,
How sadly we muse o'er pleasures gone;
How we curse the weary hours
As drenched by wintry showers,
We still the trenches hold, while the siege drags on,
Disease increased apace,
Starvation looked us in the face;
And Inkermann's fierce struggle then came on,
Yet spite of wet and cold
Shot, shell, or sortie bold,
We still the trenches hold, and the siege drags on."

But here came an unfortunate check, the singer's memory then failed him, and after singing the above all over again, and making two or three abortive attempts at the second verse, he was forced to plead *non mi recordo*.

"A judgment on you, Lester," called out Travers. "After getting through that confounded winter, it was too bad of you to recall it to our recollection."

"Oh, I don't know," said Crumbs. "I think it rather jolly to think over, now it's past and gone. Foraging now-a-days isn't half the fun it was then. There was some credit in making up a decent dinner in those times; now, if you haven't one, it's your own fault. Do you recollect that goose we had in the winter, Herries? I never dared tell you how I got hold of that."

"No, how was it? I always had dreadful suspicions, and was afraid to ask questions."

"Ah, I happened to be cruising about our lines rather early one morning, and met my friend waddling along not very far from the colonel's tent. 'Deserting, by Jove,' said I, and immediately knocked him on the head and picked him up. Put him under my coat and cut away to my own tent. Then it struck me I had heard the colonel had got hold of a goose or two, so I sat down and plucked him right off. Precious fluffy I got too in the operation. There was a rumour that afternoon that somebody had lost a goose. I am not sure, but I think it was the colonel's servant who was making so many inquiries. However, it might have been the sailors who took his; any way, I was rather relieved when that goose was eaten."

"You young marauder," laughed Langton; "'he who stole my purse, stole trash,' in those times, but he who robbed me of my goose—by Jove, penal servitude was too good for you!"

"You see, you didn't belong to our mess, Langton," said Crumbs, "or, like Herries, you'd have pitched in and asked no questions."

"You're right, one should always take the goods the Gods provide blindly, never scrutinise your commissariat department till clamorous tongues compel. You've learnt the alphabet of campaigning, Crumbs."

"And the rule of subtraction too," said Herries.

"Never mind my acquirements, and it's bad taste to dwell on one's little acquisitions. When you do light upon loot, pocket it, and don't talk of it. In the meantime, Langton, give us a song."

"Of course I will; but in the first instance, I must propose a toast."

"Hear, hear," from the table generally, and Langton rose.

"Gentlemen, we have met here to-day to do honour to our host, who, upon this occasion, I am told, attains his majority. You have already heard with a glow that must have thrilled your very heart-strings, the patriotic speech he has just made upon this interesting occasion. But what is this to the bright

example he sets us? Weighing carefully the onerous duties incurred by arrival at the dignity of manhood, in the eye of the law he has decided to devote himself here to the service of his country, in preference to disturbing the bosoms of his creditors, or causing needless excitement among the people of Israel by an undue return to his native country. Instead of raising hopes that he knows the impossibility of realising amongst a concourse of worthy tradespeople, he prefers, like some 'paladin of old,' to trust to his bow and his spear, for the obtaining a supply of those precious metals, to which arbitrary custom has assigned a stern but fictitious value.

"Avarice, gentlemen, is one of the vices of the age we live in, and instances have been rife of people, who, lost to every sense of patriotism and national honour, have objected, in pursuit of their own sordid vices, to their clients going 'where glory waits them.'

"Coming of age, meant to most of you, I presume, as it did to myself, the entering upon a property so limited that one's hat could cover it—in short, being simply,

"'Lord of oneself, that heritage of woe,'

together with the responsibilities and none of the rights of citizenship. What a consolation to think that this mischance has happened to him, in a land where the old chivalric rule is yet in full force that,

"'They may take who have the power,
And they may keep who can.'

"From the accumulative powers already displayed by our talented host, I augur many successful applications of this golden rule. Imbued as he is with the great principle that 'war should support war,' I trust we may hail his return to his native country with a head covered with laurels, and a carpet-bag bursting with plunder.

"Gentlemen, I'll detain you no longer, for though I could dilate for some time on his virtues, some of you look so con-

foundedly thirsty you might hardly bear with me. Without further oration, I give the health of Harry Rolls, more particularly known by the pseudonym of Crumbs, with three times three."

Long and loud rang out the cheers in Crumbs' honour. They generally do when the glorification of the giver of the feast is in question.

Crumbs returned thanks in a very easy and unembarrassed manner, and then Langton burst forth into one of those camp ballads, so popular at the time, so flat when seen on paper.

"There's a good time coming, boys,
A good time coming,
Subalterns no more you'll find,
Worn down by drill's oppressive grind,
In the good time coming,
They shall roam through hunting fields,
Till limbs and mind grow stronger,
And all shall have perpetual leave,
Just wait a little longer."

Such was the final stanza ; but as our poets have spared us an epic, so in common courtesy I must refrain from a song book. There is one who used to relate a laughable whaling adventure in those days, who could, if he chose, publish "*Songs of the Crimea*," and a quaint memento it would be.

Fast and furious grew the fun. Song succeeded song. One final stanza from a ballad of Coningsby Clarke's and I have done.

"To the West, to the West, on the steps of 'the Rag,'
How proudly I'd uphold the national flag,
And with stiffest of collars and benigneſt of face,
Hope that always right men might be in the right place.
With biggest 'regalia' and gin sling then at night,
With what coolness and science those Russians I'd fight,
While o'er soda next morning I'd think it the best
To send the East to the devil and stick to the West.
To the West, to the West, &c."

Then arose a cry for horses with much confusion anent saddles and bridles. A glorious moon made everything light as day. As for the homeward ride, can you not picture it? If you ever chanced to see half a dozen midshipmen mounted on hacks on their way from Malta to Civita Vecchia it may help you to an approximation. Let us trust they all got back to camp without any definite grief.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DOMESTIC CRASH.

FROM the Crimea to May Fair seems a strange change. Yet hearts beat as quick at the rushing telegrams there, as in the rustic village, the ivy-wreathed rectory, the fetid suburbs of the big towns, the lonely farmhouse on the Yorkshire wolds, midst the fens of Lincolnshire, or the gay clustering hop-gardens of Kent. Jim, Tom, Jack, the Honourable Alfred, and my Lord of Foxaby are all engaged in the same great game of life and death, and my lady's *berthe* rises and falls as quick as pretty Sue's bodice at the dread tidings flashed by the ominous wires.

London was a little dull that season. Even in the best society they a little drop balls, fêtes, and déjeûners, when sons and brothers are constantly claiming that last six feet of soil to which we all come. The most worldly mothers feel compunctions when the next telegram may record the fate of some scrapegrace boy, about whom they shall never feel anxious more.

Few people in London that season felt more dissatisfied than Mrs. Inglemere. The fair widow, as she glanced at her mirror, felt that sufficient incense was not being burnt at her shrine by a considerable quantity, or at all events if it was, it was by the wrong people. She was quite aware that that little anonymous *billet doux* might occasion some inconvenience, should it ever

be traced to her door. She considered the result quite incommensurate with the risk. It was true, as far as she could ascertain, she had succeeded in detaching Charlie Repton from the train of Belle Bartley, and that without an *esclandre*. She was not so much grieved at the latter. Her nature did not admit of very strong feelings on any subject, and she bore her rival no great malice. She was also a little frightened at what she had done. But then again it was no use Charlie's giving up making love to Belle, if he was not to recognise her as his divinity instead.

A clever unscrupulous woman, in Mrs. Inglemerc's place, would have been very well satisfied with the success of her scheme so far. To have detached Charlie from Mrs. Bartley, and that without creating a great scandal, would have satisfied her well. She would have trusted to time and opportunity for the rest; but the widow was neither clever nor patient. Her theory had been that Charlie would immediately resort for consolation in his bereavement to herself. Women do this sometimes, men rarely. They are more given to take a misanthropic view of life when jilted. A woman is apt to soothe her wounded pride by encouraging another lover.

Again Charlie Repton, though his dream of love was crushed for the present, knew that he was loved in return—a very different thing from being jilted. Again and again did that last interview recur to his mind. He cursed himself, his fate, the stock-broker; but of Belle, his lips breathed nothing but tenderness. As for the rest, he conducted himself after the manner of his kind under similar circumstances; was voted a bore in his Club smoking-room, and unbearable to dine with. Was morose over the best of claret or choicest of 'cabanas,' found continued fault with his servitors, from his valet to casual cabmen, and talked vaguely of going to Jerusalem, the Crimea, South America, or up the Nile.

And how all this time was it faring with Belle? I described things in the City not long ago as looking not merely black,

but as being enveloped in a perfect fog. The fog has lifted, as fogs sometimes do, only to be succeeded by a regular thunder-storm. Banks are crashing, and Stock Exchange lightning flashing in a manner that sends Mr. Bartley home in a state by no means pleasant to those who have the ill-luck to encounter him. He has never again alluded to the anonymous letter to Belle. Neither has he confided his difficulties to her in any way. Sullen and savage, he confines himself to spiteful sneers at any slight extravagance she may commit, is sarcastic on her dresses or things of that description, only to give vent to a furious outburst of passion, if the lavish expenditure of his table or household be touched on in any way. Belle meets these storms with haughty indifference as a rule; but is occasionally stung out of all control, and gives free rein to the vein of sarcasm that lies within her. At such times, her husband generally retires foaming and discomfited from the encounter.

The stock-broker, in his troubles, sought relief in brandy. He found it as has been said of old servants. A very good servant to begin with; but a very bad master after a time. Ardent spirits on a sullen temperament are apt to produce crime. On such temperaments, it sometimes induces knocking a wife's brains out, and cutting the throats of a family to wind up with. It produced a mild form of that feeling on Bartley, and even the servants began to complain "there was no standing master's temper!" Most of them kept out of his way pretty well; but the butler openly stated he couldn't stand it much longer, though "the pickings" were considerable.

"No, ma'am," he observed, to the housekeeper, "never having set up to be a Van Amburgh myself, I can't be expected to cope with a wild beast, and that's about the nearest description, Mrs. Feeder, I can give of him this blessed evening!"

And yet there are allowances to be made for this man—this commercial boar at bay. You must remember he has been the architect of his own fortunes. That to be a great City name is to him what titles, crosses, or political power are to other men.

That the edifice built up with years of toil is now crumbling beneath him. That he is fighting alone this losing battle inch by inch, with all the stubborn tenacity of his character. That he has no stock invested abroad in other names, no pleasant assignment to his wife. In short, that when the crash comes and the averting it seems almost hopeless now—not only his name is gone, but nothing will remain to him except the marriage settlement he has made on his wife:

It was well for them that that worldly old aunt of Belle's had insisted on that twenty thousand pounds being securely settled on her niece, and invested in the three and a half per cents. It ensured them a competence at all events. Bartley had grumbled a good deal at the time, at what he termed such absurdly small interest for capital, muttered much about old-fashioned notions; but the old lady was firm, and the events were about to prove her right. It might seem small to a man who had looked upon his income as nearly as many thousands per annum; but quite as good people live happily on a good deal less than what the settlement would leave.

Confidence had never been between these two. Indifference had been succeeded by sparring and recrimination, and now, something very like positive hatred had come between them, at all events, on the part of the lady. Belle began to ask herself whether her burden was not greater than she could bear, and to think vaguely of a separation. This continued skirmishing was more than she could endure. A battle royal seemed almost a relief. Nor were they wanting—indeed, they were becoming only too common between them.

Belle felt her life was becoming miserable past endurance. Her spirits were giving way under this daily warfare—how long could it last? how was it all to end? She longed for peace. Her husband, too, now habitually under the influence of drink, frightened her with his sullen moroseness. She never showed it, but bore herself proudly as ever. She had a strange idea that if she once showed want of nerve, there was no knowing

to what her husband's temper might lead him. If he once thought she feared him, she felt she should hardly be safe from violence. Bitterly did she repent her ill-starred marriage. Her thoughts ran too often on Charlie Repton for her peace of mind.

cepted his sentence of banishment, and she never saw him to speak to now.

Bartley and his wife are seated at dinner, that dreary *tête-à-tête* where there is no common ground to meet upon.

He has consigned the cook to the hottest corner of realms unmentionable, on account of too much pepper in the soup; snapped viciously at the housekeeper on the subject of fish; wondered why Mrs. Bartley persists in keeping such inefficient servants; has already cursed the butler for administering sherry instead of madeira, pronounced the *entrées* uneatable, and has a second time exploded at the butler with reference to the condition of some rather curious fowl.

If you dip deep into brandy, what can it matter!

There is a lull. The master of the house is yet muttering over his duckling, while Belle's face bears that bored expression that never yet failed to rouse an irritable temper.

"Perhaps, Mrs. Bartley, you can possibly account for this disgusting dinner?" he inquired, when the cloth was removed.

"I don't see so much to find fault with, but of course Mrs. Feeder is accountable."

"And as I said before, having found Mrs. Feeder so thoroughly incompetent to perform the duties she professes, why is she still here?"

"You have been fairly satisfied with her so far; but of course she can go," Belle answered carelessly. "We shall probably get somebody not so good."

"Don't talk nonsense. You know I've been dissatisfied some time. There can be little or no difficulty in getting a decent housekeeper."

"As you will," said Belle, wearily.

"I wish it was as I willed," he exclaimed, savagely, "it's not ; you've *certe blanche* to manage the house, and you don't do it."

"I hear enough sometimes about my extravagance, to make me careful of incurring additional expenses."

"That, madam, is on the subject of your own infernal fripperies ; on your taking opera boxes for nights when you know I want to give dinners."

"You had better announce your dinners a little sooner, in future, and then I shall know what to do."

"And would do the same again, I tell you."

"Excuse me, opera boxes, as you well know, must be engaged some time beforehand ; if you give me sufficient notice of when you want to ask your friends to dinner—"

"My friends," he interrupted, "they should be yours. Do you know, madam, that as you have condescended to marry a business man, it is your part to assist him to keep his connection together. The fine friends of your girlhood eat my dinners, drink my wines, and are indulged with your ladyship's smiles, while you scarcely condescend to speak to my friends whom business requires I should be on good terms with."

He was gradually working himself into a rage, much as one has seen a bull churn itself into tremendous wrath at some unwitting intruder on its domain. He, moreover, kept gulping down some fine old port, in a way that was, to say the least of it, injudicious, both as regards justice to the wine, and prudence to himself.

"I don't think you can ever say that I was anything but civil to any of your acquaintance. You can scarcely suppose on our marriage, that I was to make all your intimates mine," said Belle, with contemptuous indifference, in those cold, silvery tones that always stung him to the quick, that made him feel that, though his wife, she was not of his kind. A woman, more especially a clever one, can sting bitterly any man with whom she has near relations. Though, perhaps, more essentially a

woman's faculty, many men have it, and God help the woman who is tied to one, so that she can but endure his bitter practice. That ceaseless gibing that never misses a blot, that never lets the wound heal. I have seen women tied to the stake for life, to whom the fire and torture of the Indian would have seemed child's play. They bear it well, too, mostly, but you can read their story in their faces. It leaves lines, the nervous mouth and startled eye are an easy book to the physiognomist.

If ever woman bitterly repented "a golden marriage" (in the present English sense of the term) Belle did. A month of that marriage of pique had shown her that the apple she hardly even coveted, was verily of the Dead Sea kind. She strung herself to meet its bitterness and ashes. She had early wrapped herself in the armour of cool, cutting sarcasm. It had served her well in many a hard fight as Miss Brabazon, though I rather doubt whether it was doing her quite such good service now.

I am afraid Belle's principles were not strong. She feared ostracism, perhaps, yet might have even dared that; but she thought, as women do sometimes think, more of her lover than herself—far higher of him, probably, than he deserved. She never pictured his tiring of her, but she thought deeply of his broken life that would be under such circumstances, of how his home and friends would be closed to him, and with her woman's wit she read Charlie Repton right. He would never abandon her, but he would feel these things sorely. No, better face the fate she had made for herself, than suffer such agony as that—to live to feel she was like a mill-stone round the neck of the man she loved.

Bartley sat sullen and brooding for some minutes before he again spoke.

"And you think, of course, your fine friends will cherish and be fond of you always; especially if they should find that you can give them no more dinners. I wonder what they'd think of you without a carriage, did you ever try to fancy? Suppose you had no more opera boxes, had to wear cottons instead of

silks, had to sell your bracelets, and think twice about buying a ribbon. How then about your swell acquaintances?"

"It would be much, I fancy, as you suppose. I know the world pretty well, and am quite aware that acquaintances are not friends. I know that I have not made any of the latter. It's not my nature to do so. People whom you have turned upon sharply and spared not, instead of bending to their imperiousness, meanness, or whatever it may be, don't forget when their turn comes. No, I quite agree with you on that point; but do you suppose your friends are much more to be depended on?"

"I don't know, but you'll devilish soon have a chance of seeing."

"What do you mean? what is the matter?"

"Matter, not much. Simply this—ruin. Before a month is over, you'll have neither a carriage nor a silver fork to your mouth. Neither a house nor servants. You'll be living in lodgings with a maid of all work to attend upon you. I wonder," he said, bitterly, "whether you can use a needle?"

Her countenance was quite unmoved as she replied.

"And why was I not told of all this before. Such ruin does not occur without some omens and forebodings. Could we not have reduced our establishment and made some retrenchment to meet this blow?"

"Yes, you looked like retrenchment; no, you'll be kind enough to bear in mind that while I had money you were allowed to do as you liked. Now it's my turn. You'll have to dress in prints and learn something about the art of cooking. How nasty your efforts will all be. Did you ever try to wash your own collars and gimcracks? I should think half-pence were half-pence with that old aunt of yours."

"I don't say they were not; but mark me, I was treated as a lady, and treated as a lady I will be still. If you've neither servants nor carriages, you can still try to be a gentleman."

The bitter accent on the "try" came home.

"Curse you, madam!" he replied, "I believe you are glad I am ruined."

"I had better at once tell you I shall not remain here, if you are not more choice in your language. Glad we are ruined? Do you suppose I am a fool? apparently so, or you would have made me your confidante long since. If instead of jeering at me for spending money, you had told me the truth, you would have had little cause to complain on that head. As you delicately observed just now, I have had before this to do with small means. While I supposed we had money, I spent it. I should again—I am no economist, except by compulsion. Had you trusted me, it would have been better for you; as you did not, I don't feel myself in fault."

Yes, she had the best of it still, ever placing him in the wrong—a curse on her clever tongue. But the port wine was telling, and his losses had stung him almost to madness.

"Yes," he said, fiercely, "a fine opportunity for you to return to your old friends and your old lover. If you have forgotten the pleasant note I received a short time ago, I have not."

"Stop!" she cried. He had moved her at last, and broke through the contemptuous coldness she had hitherto preserved. "I told you before I married you that I did not love you. What was your answer? Do you recollect it? I do: 'that we should get on very well, people didn't care much about sentiment in these days;' and, God help me, I thought so, too; you took very good care that no sentiment should intrude upon our wedded life. When you read that letter to me the other morning, you refused to let me see it. I told you you were wrong. Do you think a husband that cared for his wife would take it as you did? From that day to this he has never entered your doors, or except by merest accident have I ever seen him. I tell you now as I told you then, you are on dangerous ground. Take warning, I am not one of those natures that bear much. Where you never confided, be careful how you suspect lightly."

Belle was taking high ground, with what justice the reader

may determine ; for my part, I should say the case hardly justified it ; but most women would have, I fancy, done the same.

A muttered execration and another bumper of port was Bartley's immediate rejoinder.

"No," he at last said sullenly ; "I was a fool to marry you, I know—they told me so at the time—I'm broke ; it's a fine opportunity for you to leave me, and stay where you may see more of him."

Belle rose. "I will not subject myself to further insults ; whether I could have proved a true wife to you in your troubles or no, is a question that you have evidently already decided in the negative. I think I should have tried—you have determined apparently I shall not. There is no more to be said. Good-night," and she moved towards the door.

He sprang up and intercepted her.

"No, madam ; we don't part thus !" His brutal nature was now thoroughly aroused, and past control. "By G—, you are my wife, and it's getting time you knew it ! You'll sit up till I please you to go to bed. I've not half said my say out yet."

"Better wait then till you are more fitted to express your ideas in decent language."

He stepped forward, and ere she could avoid him, struck her heavily on the cheek with his open hand.

Belle reeled slightly from the blow ; but not a cry escaped her.

"Coward !" she hissed, between her teeth ; as she jumped back promptly, and laid her hand on the bell.

Half-cowed, he shrank back ; but still stood between her and the door. He had never ventured thus length yet.

Belle rang.

"A bed-room candle, immediately !" she said, as the servant appeared ; and till his return, she stood with her hand on the bell. Advancing, she took it from the man's hand, and swept from the room.

Bartley said never a word ; a muttered execration on the servant, and he resumed his seat. Pleasant thoughts they were

to be left alone with. He thought over his coming failure, and wondered where he would be this time next year. Then he thought over the quarrel with his wife. He wished, now, he had not struck her—curse her! Why did she anger him? Then he wondered whether, if he had told her all, she would have been different and tried to help him? bah! what did women know of such things? Was not their vocation to spend money, while their husbands made it? Yes; confound that blow! Nice story for his wife to take to her friends. Then he fell to wondering what she would do. She had the best of him always—more than ever now. Then soda-brandy, oblivion, and bed occurred to him, and he rang.

A quick ear might have detected the slam of the street door, as he did so. Closely veiled, and carrying a small travelling-bag in her hand, Belle stepped out into the night, and left her husband's roof.

Half an hour afterwards, in an advanced state towards the oblivion he craved for, Bartley sought his dressing-room. A note lay on the table; but failed to catch an eye past anything nearly but the multiplication of candles. It mattered little, though it was no sedative for him when he mastered its contents next morning.

"You can scarcely suppose," it ran, "after what has taken place, that I should remain under your roof. If your circumstances are such as you represent them, it may be necessary that we communicate on business matters; personally, I trust we shall never meet again. I shall therefore send an address, at which a letter may reach me, to your solicitors."

As may be supposed, there was considerable confusion in the house next morning, when it was discovered that Belle had departed—no one knew whither. Bartley, after some few inquiries, betook himself to the City, and left his household to wonder and conjecture as they might.

Forty-eight hours afterwards, or less, it was town talk. The Thermopolium knew all about it.

"Only wonder Repton's been so long about it!" said old Carribosh, most notorious of *quidnuncs* at that venerable institution. "In my time, we lost or won our battles quicker. Troy seems to have been revived in Sebastopol; but Charlie Repton's not the form of Paris."

Some juvenile member, still young enough to have some regard for veracity in his scandal, ventured to enquire particulars. "Cleverly planned, sir. Met him at Waterloo Station, in time to catch the night mail for Havre. Bartley went to Southampton by special next morning, like a fool—came to his senses, and returned to consult his lawyer; not the sort of man to fight about it; besides those days are over. When our wives leave us now-a-days, we treat it as a little legal difficulty. Queer view to take—sensible perhaps. Such women are hardly worth being shot at for."

Poor Mrs. Inglemere seemed most to be pitied; when she heard the news she took to sal volatile, and her maid had a hard time of it for three days. As far as it was in her weak nature to care for any one, she had cared for Repton. She was like a child over its lost sugar-plums.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE EIGHTEENTH OF JUNE, '55.

JUST forty years ago, the British Army lay waiting for daylight on the memorable ridge that lies between Hougomont and La Haye Sainte. On their wet cheerless bivouacs, the Waterloo men shivered away the night, knowing that the morrow would see the great struggle of years brought to a final issue. It was the evening before

"That great day of milling when blood lay in lakes,
When kings held the bottle and Europe the stakes.

Napoleon versus Wellington. The Champion of Europe against the Champion of the Peninsula—stake, independence of Europe and the belt of the universe. A great fight, a close thing ; but the Duke won.

We are once more amongst the bell tents of the Crimean army, as they glisten in the light of the setting sun. That luminary descending in gorgeous splendour, flashes his dying rays over the plateau before Sebastopol.

There is another biggish fight of the same kind due here the morrow's morn ; but the British and French armies this time stand side by side. "In the multitude of counsellors is safety," saith the Psalmist. "In the multitude of counsellors is weakness," quoth the practical soldier of the nineteenth century. Better one ordinary man who plays his own game than half-a-dozen clever ones, who play a game of combination. Give me the man who plays his own hand, and I'll back him against him who plays under advice, at Racing, War, or Ecarté.

Think of Clive, who after calling his captains together, and listening to their opinion of not fighting, determined he would—winning Plassey and India as the result of his resolution.

High went the shells ; deep boomed the guns, and everybody in that vast array felt that Sebastopol's hour had come. That the Russians meant fighting it out, and stubbornly too, nobody doubted ; but of course if the allies were to "go in" they'd get in, though some might not live to see it. The Russians had shown too often how they could, and would fight, to leave much doubt about its being a stiffish task that the allies had set themselves ; but of course if they did fairly assault, they would be successful.

The dying sunlight flashes on the bayonets, as the various covering parties wend their way to their several *rendezvous*, looking like so many glittering snakes as they wind up and down the sides of the ravines. Very different from that cold drizzling rain of forty years ago, in which the Waterloo men passed the night before their deed of "derring do."

Everybody knew that the assault would take place at day-break. Indeed, so well was it known, that I could fancy the Russian General Orders for the day, concluding some how in this way : "Soldiers, the enemy will assault at daybreak, on the signal of three rockets from the French right. The Emperor has no doubt of their repulse. The Czar places implicit reliance on his children, and already congratulates them on the results of their unshrinking valour and steadfast fidelity. There will be deaths to deplore ; but regret for the fallen will be softened by their glorious end."

The officers break into little knots as they arrive at the Divisional Parade ground, and talk cheerily over the morrow's work which is to end all this dreary trench duty. Every one knows there are many who have already seen their last sunset ; but nobody fancies he will be included in the list of killed, or badly wounded,

"Hope rests eternal in the human breast."

Well it is so, or not only would men, like Falstaff, have "no stomach for fighting," but would succumb to those far fiercer battles of ordinary life, compared to which Inkermanns, Solferinos and Sadowas are but child's play.

Jones's play was d—d, does it follow that mine should not succeed ? Thompson has lost his last shilling in speculation ; but mine are more surely based than his. Young Henderson went down, riddled at Inkermann ; but his cousin got the brevet and a C.B. I don't know whether being killed clean in the game of war, is not preferable to being utterly ruined in the game of commerce. You are spared all anxiety about beginning again. You have thrown deuce, ace, and there's an end of it. Your commercial man may throw out to the end of the chapter.

Stay, let us listen to what some of our friends have to say on the subject.

"It will be hottish work to-morrow morning," said Herries,

"however, it's a thing we'd have been glad to compromise a week's trenches for, any time these six months."

"Of course," rejoined Crumbs, "and think of 'the loot.' Shouldn't wonder, Jack, my boy, if I found enough spoons inside there to rig our mess up with, regular Russian fiddle pattern, till some body goes 'a mucker' at loo."

"More kicks that half-pence, young 'un, about getting in there," and Jack Travers jerked his head in the direction of the city. "Do you recollect a remark of poor Delpré's, Herries? I don't know what brings it into my head now. It was when we were quartered at Milton. We were sitting round the mess-table talking about the sensation of first being under fire. Delpré was the only one of us at that time who had ever undergone his baptism in that respect, somewhere in India, you know; well, we appealed to him on the subject. Do you recollect his answer?"

"No, though I recollect something of the talk. What was it?"

"I remember it well. 'Being shot at,' he said, 'is disagreeable; so is standing a cracker on the favourite as he dies away at the half distance. For choice, I think I'd prefer the former, there's no row you see with your friends afterwards.'"

"He's right," laughed Crumbs. "It's something the sensation of having to defend a heavy pool at 'unlimited loo,' with nothing in your hand."

"Fall in men," suddenly cried Herries, as the Colonel commanding approached.

"Who commands the —th trench guard?" inquired the Colonel.

"I do, sir," said Herries.

"Very well, you know the ground, no doubt. You'll occupy and hold the right of the fourth parallel till daybreak, when you will receive further orders. In the event of not getting such orders for some little time after the assault has commenced, keep your rifles going on the embrasures of the Redan."

Herries touched his cap, and moved his party off. They wound their way down the ravine, almost paved with the shot and shell that had fallen in it from the Russian batteries since the siege commenced, and in something under an hour had reached their destination. Herries sent out his sentries in skirmishing order over the parapets, and observed,

"You go round them, Jack, to begin with, and see they are all in their proper places."

"All right," and Jack jumped over the parapet. It was a bright, moonlight night, and withdrawing a sentry a little here, pushing one a little forward there, Jack pursued his way. Crack went three or four rifles as he came to his extreme left; he hurried on, and found that a slight collision had taken place between the sentries that connected with his own and two or three inquisitive Russian sharpshooters, who had crept up to the crest of the hill. A smart young non-commissioned officer was carried past Jack, as he made his way back to the trench, a victim to the sharpshooter's bullet; but his comrades expressed great self-gratulation in that "they had tumbled the Rooshian down the hill also."

All night long the whizz and roar of the shells was incessant. The sky seemed alive with meteors, as the allies persistently rained on the devoted city a ceaseless storm of iron. The excitement was intense, and with high-strung nerves, Jack, Herries, Rolls, &c., awaited the first streaks of dawn. With the earliest tinge of grey the sentries were withdrawn, and all now anxiously awaited daybreak. Nothing is heard yet but the constant boom and whistle of the shells. Suddenly the sharp rattle of musketry and a rocket from the right announce that the French have opened the ball at the Malakoff. A hill intervenes between the ground occupied by the —th and the French attack; they can see nothing. The roar of the big guns is now accompanied by the incessant crash of musketry. Suddenly, a stir is seen in the advanced trenches of the right attack. Dark masses of men and the dull gleam of bayonets can be plainly

discerned through the grey of the morning with a race glass. An opaque column gathers outside the parapet.

"By Jove! what a handful," exclaimed Travers. "Blaze away, men, at the embrasures of the Redan."

There go the scaling ladders. A figure rushes to the front waving a sword, and away go the stormers, poor Sir John Campbell leading them. They rush on, and are lost over the crest of the hill.

"There go the supports," said Jack, as another mass slowly forms outside the parapet. Crash go the flank batteries of the Redan, and a storm of grape cuts up the ground in front of the forming column.

"Fire at the flank batteries," shouted Herries. "Watch the flash of the gun, and aim at that."

The smoke now almost concealed the work; the trench is a blaze of musketry, and the fierceness with which the grape and shot whistle about it, shows that the Russians endeavour to reciprocate its attentions.

The smoke lifts; clear against the sky, standing on the parapet of the salient angle of the Redan, is the figure of a man. He is a Russian evidently, and is firing rifles at the assaulting party, as fast as his comrades can hand them to him. Good God, they have not got in yet, or he could not be there. More than a hundred rifles are aimed at him. He bears a charmed life, and continues to fire rapidly from his exposed position. Ah, he is hit at last, he throws his arms wildly in the air, and falls backwards amongst his comrades in the interior of the work. Now some half-dozen red-coats are seen running back to the trench, one falls before he reaches it, another, and then another. A dozen more come struggling back.

"They are come for more ladders," exclaim Jack and Herries, simultaneously.

The fire gradually slackens, the supports have thrown out skirmishers, the grape cuts the ground all around them, three

or four roll over never to rise again, the skirmishers retire still rapidly dropping. The truth flashes across Herries.

"We are beat back!" he exclaimed, "and the skirmishers are covering the retreat."

"What the devil's all this!" cried Jack, as the sharp, continuous rattle of musketry on the left fell upon their ears.

"It is Eyre's brigade, who have taken the cemetery, and penetrated the suburbs; they can go no further; to advance is destruction, the French are beaten back at the Malakoff, the English at the Redan. Retreat is impossible. It is broad daylight now, and they would be mowed down by the batteries; there is nothing for it but to remain there till nightfall, passing the day in incessant skirmishing with the enemy, jealous as ever of losing a few yards of ground."

Extraordinary is the lull that seems to take place by eleven A.M., the furious cannonade that has been maintained without intermission for forty-eight hours by the allies has utterly died away. The savage storm of shot, shell, and canister, so profusely lavished by the Russians some two or three hours ago, has entirely subsided. It is a glorious summer day. An occasional random shot from either side is all that remains of the tempest of the morning. It reminds one of a "white squall" in the deceitful Mediterranean, with its hereafter of bright sunshine, blue, dancing waters, and low rumblings, to that which had anon been a seething cauldron of foam 'neath a sky as black as Erebus; and to keep up the metaphor, the sun pours down his burning rays on those poor, splintered fragments of the wreck.

The stretchers have been busy this morning, and their canvas is stained blood red in proof of their industry; but yet the eye may see many a scarlet clad warrior lying out in the open who has dropped in his tracks like the stricken deer. Some of these figures move from time to time uneasily, others lie motionless in the grim foreground of that picture; and the sun shines bright, and the wearied trench guards sleep. No birds sing

ginal position ; tired from the excitement of the assault, men and officers dozed away the mid-day hours. Towards the afternoon, race glasses and telescopes were busy on those little scarlet heaps, that lay between the Redan and the advanced trench of the right attack ; speculating on which were still alive, a deduction only to be drawn by closely observing whether any of them moved. At last, great interest was attracted to a couple of gabions that were simultaneously thrown over the latter trench, immediately followed by a couple of scarlet uniforms. Pushing a gabion before him, each man, slowly on hands and knees, crept in the direction of one of the little red heaps to see if he could render any assistance to a wounded comrade. The first two or three they came to, were evidently beyond human help. Emboldened by the leniency of the Russians, they pushed further forward, and one, at least, had evidently found some one alive ; the little red heap was seen to move, and doubtless gulped eagerly from the canteen that was held to him. Here a good-natured shot or two from the Redan warned against further advance, and leaving his gabion to protect his wounded comrade, the man ran back to his trench, which he reached unharmed, as did also his rather less venturesome companion. The Russians having abstained from firing on them, or the probabilities are, they also would have been among the little red heaps on the open plateau.

They knew something of the courtesies of war, those enemies of ours, and could do a chivalrous thing at times. We are told great stories of their misdeeds among our wounded at Inkermann ; but men, especially uneducated men, are hard to hold when their blood is up, when the tigerish thirst to kill has entered their soul ; and I fancy, after the Alma. or rather at the finish of that battle, our gallant friends the Zouaves behaved very little better. And now rumours fly about as to the losses of the morning. It is said (alas ! too truly,) Sir John Campbell is killed at the head of the stormers. That

Eyre's Brigade has lost fearfully down in the cemetery below, and cannot yet extricate itself. That more than two thousand men and a hundred officers are *hors de combat*, (rumour always exaggerates). That the assault will be renewed at day-break to-morrow. These, and other far more improbable stories, travel through the trenches.

Very late is it before the order comes to withdraw; both the old and relieving covering parties having been kept to cover the retreat of that part of Eyre's brigade which has penetrated the suburbs of the town.

At last the welcome order comes, and Herries gives the word to retire. Slowly passing through the maze of trenches, and scorning the delusive safety held forth by an enfiladed boyeau, Herries led his party across the open. It was a bright, moonlight night. Just before they reach the second parallel, fizz, whizz, whirr, whirr, just like the whirl of a flock of sparrows, a discharge of grape sweeps across them. One man drops dead, two or three stumble forward, and then pitch over on their faces. Among the latter is Jack Travers. Quick as thought, they are picked up by their comrades, and carried into the second parallel.

"Good God, Jack! are you much hurt?" cries young Rolls.

A low moan was the only response.

"Run back, Crumbs, and hurry the doctor forward, he is only just in the rear there," cried Herries.

Young Rolls dashed back best pace, and within five minutes returned with the surgeon.

Travers was lying on the ground, with his jacket thrown open, Herries supporting his head, his eyes closed, a slight bloody froth oozing from his lips.

The doctor bent over him. Quick as thought the keen surgical scissors rip open the flannel shirt, and the doctor's eyes peer over that heavy-looking bruise, from the centre of which the blood slowly trickles. It is but for a minute. For a second or two his fingers linger on the prostrate man's pulse.

"A stretcher here, quick!" he cried. "Lift his head, Herries; while I force a little brandy between his teeth. There, that's so, now lift him on the stretcher and get him up to camp as quick as you can."

"He's very badly hurt?" said Herries, interrogatively, as some of the soldiers bore their captain campwards. "Is it likely to be fatal?"

"It's no use ever mincing matters out here. Poor Travers, I should think, will never speak again. It's doubtful whether he will live even to reach the camp—impossible he can last till daybreak to-morrow. My own opinion is that he will not be conscious again, though some two or three hours may elapse before life absolutely ceases."

Sadly they bore him to his tent, and laid him on his own bed. Herries, the Doctor, and Rolls watched by him to the last, but the Doctor was only too accurate in his view of the case. Poor Jack never spoke again. He lay for some three hours, a very low moaning and faint pulsation alone marked that he yet lived. At the end of that time, a slight fluttering of the half-closed eyelids, a few nervous twitchings of the muscles of the mouth, and all was over. Poor Jack Travers' course was run. The warm pulses of life were stopped in their prime—henceforth

"Shall nought his quiet cumber."

The golden bowl is broken. Love's young dream lies shattered. Poor Jack sleeps with thousands of others, in front of the famous fortress whose siege will be the talk of future ages.

"They have lifted him up and his head sinks away,
And his face showeth bleak in the moonlight and grey.
Leave him now where he lieth, for oh, never more
Will he kneel at an altar or stand on a floor;
Could his bride gaze upon him."

CHAPTER XXXV.

BREAKING THE NEWS.

STRANGE rumours are rife about town this sunshiny morning :—Sebastopol is taken. No, the allies have got the Flagstaff battery, but not the remainder of the place.

"Know it for a fact, sir," says old Carribosh at the Thermopolium. "Met Jennings on my way through the Park, he had been at the War Office."

"There has been a big fight, and our people were licked," says young Thistleton (he hates Carribosh and always contradicts him on principle). "The French have had to abandon their trenches and fall back on Kamiesch. Hang your War Office information, I have just come back from the city. They know what's going on a devilish deal earlier than your War Office people do. Funds dropping like a barometer before a cyclone, everybody looking as glum as a Methodist preacher who don't take. Bartley's shutters up by the way. Stopped payment yesterday. Nobody much surprised, he's been on the go these last three months."

People wandered up and down. Heard the news from the Crimea? was in every one's mouth. That a severe battle had taken place seemed certain. That the Allies had had the worst of it was the impression, as the day wore on. In the afternoon indistinct rumours of a heavy loss to the English were current, and the rush for the evening papers was great in consequence.

Tom Lyttlereck was restless and uneasy that morning. The report of Belle's elopement (only some three or four days before) had troubled him greatly. He liked both her and Charlie Repton much, and he knew the misery that such a step must entail. He did not moralize in the least on the subject ; simply two people he was very fond of had come to grief. Despite all inquiries, he could make out nothing. Belle had left her hus-

band's house, and gone no one knew whither. Repton had been seen in town even the day after Belle's flight, but had now left. Such was all the information a call at Repton's rooms and cross-examination of his servants afforded.

"Bad business, I am afraid," said Tom, as he sat at breakfast with his wife in their sunshiny little house in Pimlico. "I can't make it out. I still hope that though Belle has left her husband, Charlie may have nothing to do with it."

Laura was not an uncharitable woman by any means, but she would have been hardly true to her sex had she adopted any other opinion than the one she held.

"I wish I could think so," she replied, "but you know all we saw at Folkestone, and in London afterwards. I fear there is no hope that she has not gone off with him. Poor Charlie! how foolish, how very foolish!"

Yes, woman like, her pity was for him, not for the supposed partner of his guilt, though the punishment would fall far heavier on her than her companion.

"Laura, Laura, be a little more charitable. Let us hope for the best till we get proof to the contrary, at all events."

"I can't help it, Tom, I can't indeed; I know it's wrong, but I can't think otherwise. I don't wish to judge Belle hardly, but it was her fault. I think I am sorry for her, but I know I am for Charlie; I trust you may be right, and that they are not together; but I don't believe it."

Laura may seem harsh in her views; but once let a woman sit in judgment on a sister's delinquencies, and I fear impartial justice is seldom administered. She had spoken the truth. She was sorry for Belle, yet felt no patience with her, and persisted in looking on Repton as a victim. Society hardly judges such cases fairly, and metes out uneven punishment to the transgressors. The temptation comes as often from one side as the other. Women run away with men quite as often as men run away with women; but most assuredly the social punishment is by no means even.

"Well, I must be off," said Tom. "I am too restless to work this morning. Look out for me about two, little woman, and I'll come and tell you the news of the day."

"Do come home to lunch, and we'll walk down and call on Breezie Langton afterwards. I haven't seen her this week."

"It's a bargain," said Tom, as he took his departure.

Tom wended his way towards the Temple, there to have a talk with some literary *confrères*. The rumour of Crimean news met his ear ere he had crossed St. James' Park. In the Strand he met one of those ubiquitous persons, who having no business of their own are quite *au fait* with every one's else. From him he learnt that Bartley had suspended payment. This took Tom very much aback. City gossip was a thing that did not fall much in his way. Few people were much better up in the talk of the town, literary, sporting, scandalous, or theatrical, than he was: but he seldom heard anything more than the papers told him of the great money-making hive round Threadneedle Street.

He walked on, pondering on this. It made matters still worse, he thought. That a woman should leave her husband on the threshold of his trouble seemed to him monstrous. His faith in Belle began to be shaken, and it was with a much perturbed mind that he turned in under the low Temple archway.

Once there, and in the rooms of one of his friends, he found the Crimean news the all-absorbing topic. What was really the result of the battle that had taken place? That it had been disastrous to the allies no one doubted. Before Tom wended his way home again, he had so far got at the truth of it, that he had ascertained there had been an assault on the town which had been heavily repulsed.

He had hardly opened his door when Laura, with her eyes full of tears, rushed to meet him.

"Oh, Tom, here's such a shocking telegram just come for you. I opened it. There has been a dreadful battle in the Crimea, and poor Jack Travers is killed."

"Good God ! Where is it ?"

"Here, dear. How terrible for poor Breezie."

Tom looked at the telegram. It was from Langton, and ran as follows :

"Assaulted on the eighteenth--beaten back with great loss--poor Travers killed--pray break it to Breezie. Have telegraphed also to Belle Bartley. All particulars by mail."

Grim things these telegrams, they seem to dispose of a life in three words--aye, of hundreds, "Great loss," are two ominous words to receive by those fatal wires.

"Oh, Tom," sobbed Laura, "what is to be done ? Shall you go down to Breezie this afternoon ?"

"Yes, my darling, and you will have to go with me. It will be harder work for you than me, Laura. You will have to break this to her. No man can tell it so well as a woman. Don't think, wife mine, that I don't know how painful a task I am setting you. I would spare it you if I could ; but you must undertake this. Be brave, Laura. Think what you have to undergo compared to her, poor girl. Don't cry."

"I can't help it. No, Tom, I will be quiet directly," said Laura, in an hysterical manner, highly contradictory of the implied promise. "No, don't say anything more to me. Yes, I know I must do it ; but oh, I do so dread it !"

"Well, you may sit down quietly now. We won't start for half an hour ; but recollect it must be done, and soon. Poor Breezie must not be left to hear this by chance."

"It will be terrible," said Laura, as about an hour afterwards they approached Langton's house. "You don't know how she loved him."

Tom knocked.

"I shall call for you again in an hour. You will want all your self-command, recollect. For her sake, poor girl, keep as collected as you can."

"I will do my best," said Laura, with a nervous tremor of the lip as the door opened.

Breezie received her cordially. "I am so glad to see you, Laura. Do take your bonnet off at once. I have seen no one all the week, and was just thinking I would trot up and have some tea with you. Now I will give you some, and you shall take me home to dinner, if you will be that charitable to a lonely young lady."

"Of course, I will, dear," said Laura, inwardly hoping she might. "Tom is to call for me presently, and we will bear you off with us."

"There, get into that arm-chair then, and we'll have a quiet chat till he comes. The Crimean mail is not in yet, is it?"

"No," said Laura, averting her face, "I think not," and her heart sank within her.

"I was in hopes you came to herald letters from Jack and papa. I always look upon you as the harbinger of good news, since you were the first to tell me of Jack's promotion."

Laura gave a great gulp, and said nervously, "There are rumours, Breezie, of a great battle in the Crimea, though no one knows as yet quite what has happened."

The girl rose, walked across the room, and knelt at Laura's feet. She gazed steadily into her face for a moment, and exclaimed :

"What is it, let me hear? I have a right to know. I can see it in your face. What have you heard? Is he wounded? In pity's sake, speak! I can see you have bad news to tell me. Laura Lyttlereck, what have you heard?" and she grasped Laura's wrist almost fiercely in her excitement.

"There has been a dreadful battle, Breezie, dear," replied Laura, speaking fast and nervously, "a great many are killed and wounded. Your father is safe, but poor Jack's regiment has suffered severely."

"Poor Jack! you have heard from my father, and I have not.

I see it all now ! oh, God help me, he is dead !" and she dropped her head into Laura's lap, and lay motionless.

For a few seconds Laura did not move. Twice she essayed to speak, but the words would not come, at last she faltered forth, "Breezie, listen to me," but the girl lay motionless across her lap. At last she raised her head, it dropped heavily across her arm, and then Laura saw that she had fainted. With some little difficulty she got her across to the sofa, and rang the bell. A maid servant appeared. They bathed her temples, dashed cold water in her face, and in a few minutes she gave signs of returning consciousness. She opened her eyes, looked at Laura for a minute, and then closed them again. A shiver ran through her frame, and she seemed like one stricken to death.

"We must get her to bed," said Laura, "and you must find a room for me. I shall stay here to-night. I don't think a doctor would be any use, at all events at present. She has heard bad news from the Crimea."

They got her up to her room, and undressed her. She said nothing ; but once or twice looked into Laura's face with such a piteous expression of misery, that Laura was unable to restrain her tears.

Apparently she read it aright, for with a low wailing cry she turned her face away. There she lay for more than an hour, so still, she might almost have been a corpse. Her rich brown hair tumbled in confusion over the pillow ; her eyes fixed with a stony stare, painful to look upon, while nothing but a nervous trembling about the mouth betokened consciousness. At the end of that time, Laura felt her wrist feebly grasped, the pale wan lips moved anxiously, and the large brown eyes looked, oh, so eagerly into her own. She leant over the bed, and caught the faint whisper.

"Wounded badly ; ah, yes ! but not dead ! in mercy's sake say so !"

Laura hesitated. She felt her face told all. She saw the eager glance die out of the eyes, as she gently shook her head.

Once more the low cry broke from the pale lips—the wail of a heart nigh breaking, the plaint of a spirit face to face with its misery.

Laura sat for a few minutes; then wiping the drops from her own tear-stained cheeks, glided from the room.

“Wait at the door,” she said to the maid. “You say my husband is below; I shall be back in five minutes.”

She found Tom in the little drawing-room.

“Well,” he said, “how does she bear it?”

“It’s wretched to see her. I am afraid I broke it very badly; but the truth is, she read it all in my face at a glance. She has only spoken once since, and that was to ask if there was no hope. I thought it best to give her none. It seemed more merciful to say ‘No’ at once, than hold out false hopes. I hardly know what to do with her. If she would only cry; but she has never shed a tear since she knew it. I don’t think a doctor would be any use, do you?”

“No; not at present. You can’t leave her, of course?”

“No. I shall stop here all night. You had better go home and send Lizzie with some things for me. If I can, to-morrow, I shall bring her home with me.”

“Quite right. I shall come up again after dinner, to see if I can be of any use to you. You must stay with her, poor girl! for the present; but the sooner we can get her away the better. Good-bye.”

When Tom returned that evening, poor Breezie was delirious, and it was high time for a doctor. Laura did not return home for three weeks, and then she was accompanied by a pale, ghostly-looking girl, whose big brown eyes seemed ever gazing far away into the memories of the past. Those that knew her in her brightness, would hardly have recognised Breezie Langton, as, dressed in the deepest mourning, she sat with a listless air in Tom Lyttlereck’s drawing-room.

“Breezie, dear,” said Laura, one morning; some fortnight or so after her return home. “If you feel strong enough, there is

a letter from your father we want you to read or listen to. I know, darling, it is reopening the old, terrible grief ; but I think it will be a comfort to you. We have told you how he died. Will it not be a consolation to you, to know how truly he loved and thought of you to the last ? ”

“ Perhaps, yes ; but I have never doubted it. Laura, if I had, I think I too should have died. I am very weak, but I think I can bear things better as they are, than ever to have doubted *that* ! ”

“ And you never need do, Breezie. Your father saw him laid in his grave, and Captain Herries took your father over to his tent afterwards, and gave him a paper which poor Jack had placed in his hands some months before. It is a will, and he says there that he leaves everything he has ‘to her whom I look upon already as my dearly-beloved wife.’ ”

Breezie sat motionless. She cared little to know of what she had become the possessor. She felt that she had lost her all.

“ There is also a letter for you. Should you like to have that now ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! Give me that,” she said, softly ; and the sweet, pale face lit up, as she stretched out her hand for it.

Poor Jack ! he was but a good, honest, rattling, straight-forward fellow—nothing much in him—yet had he won such love as better men have striven in vain for. Woman is comprehensible—Titania and Bottom—Beauty and the Beast, are they not true stories ? How clever women cherish fools, aye, for the matter of that, clever men too. I suppose we all seek relaxation. Men of talent love their wives’ prattle. Women of intellect their husbands’ babble.

The girl opened the last letter she was ever to receive from him she had loved so well.

“ MY DARLING BREEZIE,

“ If ever this reach your hands—which I trust it never may—I shall be gone. Yes, dearest, shall never live to realize the

most cherished hope of my life—the calling you my wife. It will be hard for you to bear, love, far harder than for me to die; and yet you have made life so sweet to me, that if it is given me to have time to think, I shall die with bitter anguish at not seeing your dear face once more. You are far too good for me, I can but say against it that I love you so truly. Dearest, if I fall, think that my last hope, my last thought, was of thee; that as long as my lips could move they uttered thy name, with blessings on it. What little I have to leave is yours, my wife, dearly-loved wife, though no marriage ceremony ever passed between us. Once more, Breezie, dearest, farewell! Think of me a little as one who, had he been spared, would have done his best to make you happy. You will grieve for me, I know, darling; but trust as I do, that if Heaven wills I shall never see you more, though hard to bear, it is for the best. God ever bless, and protect thee, and believe me to the last,

“Ever thine,

“JACK TRAVERS.”

“P.S. Your father will know about my affairs, and it will be a comfort to me at the last, to think that I have been able to leave a little to my darling wife.”

A faint smile curved Breezie's lips as she finished, and the tears ran down her cheeks.

“Poor Jack,” she murmured, “he did love me, spite of all my foolishness. No one will ever love me again like him! Never, never.”

Laura wisely said nothing for some time.

“Now, Breezie,” she said at last, “here's one little bit more of news for you. Your father is coming home. Are you not glad? I shall leave you to read his letter while I go and see what that husband of mine is about,” and Laura trotted off to Tom's *sanctum*.

“Ah! you little sceptic. Woman who thought there was no good left in this world. Unbeliever, maligner, traducer; I was

just coming for you. Sit down, and do penance for your uncharitableness," exclaimed Tom, as she entered his room. Let me find you the hardest chair, and ring for the biggest pitcher of unsavoury water. Peas in your shoes, little infidel, I insist on. For me

'Till high the cup of Samian wine.'

Bring me one, bring me two, bring me a dozen bottles of champagne."

"My dear Tom! What is the matter? What do you mean?"

"That you ought to be put on bread-and-water for a month, for your want of faith in poor Belle Bartley. I have just got a note from her. She left her husband because he ill-treated her, and is now staying with her aunt at Chiswick; I am as glad as if I had won a thousand pounds. Says she has written to Cis Langton to tell him everything. Does not mention Charlie Repton, and is evidently in total ignorance of all the scandal connected with her name. Her note to me is principally to know when Cis is likely to be home; there, read it, sceptic, and recant," and in the exuberance of his spirits, Tom hugged his wife most affectionately.

"Oh, Tom! I am so glad. You may call me all the names you like, now this is so. I own I was afraid it was otherwise."

"Afraid, you know you never doubted it was."

"Well," said Laura, "if I have feared the worst, you can't rejoice more than I do in this. How nicely she writes, too, about poor Breezie's troubles."

"Laura, we'll go and see her, and make Breezie go with us if we can. Never thought much of Bartley myself."

"Yes; when do you expect Mr. Langton home?"

"Well, he might be here in a week or so, now. But run away, there's a good woman, for I have a lot to do before lunch, if possible."

Laura nodded, and tripped out of the room, leaving her husband to his vocation.

CHAPTER XXXVI

TEN YEARS AFTER.

TEN years have passed and gone nearly, since the Eighteenth of June, Fifty-five. It is the Monday preceding the Derby, and the smoking-room of the Thermopolium is in great force: The denizens thereof state their divers opinions with a confidence that many of them will find highly fallacious that day week. Several high principled members are looking forward to appeasing the most irritable of their creditors out of the "little pots" they feel so confident of landing next Wednesday afternoon on the breezy Epsom Downs; others are beseeching their friends not to miss having at least "a tenner" on such a really good thing as—and here the several voices die away to mysterious whispers.

"I know all about his trial. Can't lose, bar accidents. Had it straight from the stable. Mind you back it."

Confidence in information seems proportionate with the youth of the speaker; and one young gentleman, who, if he has attained his majority, is still, apparently, some years off the attainment of whiskers, boldly states, "that The Carol cannot lose, and announces his intention of having a niceish yacht for the autumn, as soon as it has 'come off.'"

He talks patronizingly to a stoutish well-whiskered man, with an eye-glass, who, in rather languid tones, expresses an opinion that the French horse will take a deal of beating.

"Pooh, my dear fellow, it took all Grimshaw knew, to get him home in 'the Guineas'—besides, his legs are so shaky they've hardly dared to gallop him since."

He is an old acquaintance of ours, that believer in the French horse, though the slim Captain of the Balaklava charge has in racing parlance 'thickened a good deal' since that memorable October day. Coningsby Clarke has had a turn in India since

then, and did good service in the Mutiny times round about Lucknow, and through Oude generally. Fortune has favoured him, for his liver is still in tolerable repair, while he commands his old regiment, now stationed at Aldershott. Irreverent cornets occasionally whisper that the colonel is running a little to stomach; but Coningsby looks well yet, even if he can't quite get into the overalls of ten years ago.

"Tell you what, 'youngun,'" says Coningsby, "I don't believe in these wondrous dark horses. Blink Bonnies come out once in a life time. I won a tidy stake on the Frenchman over 'the Guineas,' and am standing him again. I shall have a goodish run for my money, you'll see."

"How are you, Coningsby?"

"How do, Archer? What's the news with you?"

"Well, I don't know," said that gentleman, as he dropped into an adjoining chair. "No chance of rational conversation till this week is well over. Fellows don't ask you now how you are; but what you're on."

"Come, you take as much interest in the Derby as most men."

"Perhaps so; what I object to is absorption in it. Why can't some of these fellows take an interest in something else besides? Look at little Shadrach there, he couldn't utter a connected sentence without introducing it to save his life. He's bored me this month past. There's one comfort, vengeance draws near; he's got an awful book, and this day week is the settling."

Coningsby laughed.

"By the way," continued Archer, "I suppose it is all true that Repton is going to marry Mrs. Bartley?"

"I fancy so. He's worn the willow a long while for her now—ten years and more. Bartley, you see, declined to take himself off for so long. About a couple of years since he died, ain't it?"

"Hardly as much. What scandal there was about them at one time."

"Yes; rank libel, though, I believe. Still, from all I hear—

I was in the Crimea at the time—they gave very fair occasion for it, and couldn't complain much of being talked of."

"When a woman leaves her husband, she's always talked of, even if he's the greatest brute unhung, and Bartley was not so bad as that. Talking of marriage, when's your turn coming? Getting time it did, you know. Why don't you marry something comfortable, cut the Service, and settle?"

"Why, you see, for one thing, old fellow; I've got so used to debts and difficulties, respectability would be safe to bore me."

"Nonsense! You're verging on the forties. Have finished with sentimental paroxysms. Go in for money and comfort."

"Always cut heiresses on principle. If you are decently civil, they fancy you're after their money-bags, and freeze accordingly. Never saw an heiress could afford to be natural, unless she was a perfect Gorgon. Knows somebody's necessities will make him take her at last."

"There you are wrong, Coningsby. I have known several men marry a bit of money, and live very happily with their wives, too."

"Can't say about that, I go by my own lights. You know Jim Chippendale? I don't know a much better fellow than poor Jim was, as long as he had only his debts to live upon. One of the cheeriest fellows out. In an evil day, he married a couple of thousand a year. One seldom sees him now. He turned up here about this time last year. Got quite himself again, and said he'd go down with us on Thursday to see the Ascot Cup run. I bet him a sovereign he didn't. Of course he didn't, and I've never seen him since."

"Just as well perhaps for Jim, he don't 'get quite himself again' very often. If, for some years before his marriage, Jim ever went to bed by candlelight, he was guilty of uncalled-for extravagance."

"What's that got to do with it? One can go to bed at decent hours, and still remain a bachelor, I presume."

"Don't talk bosh, what I mean is, Jim Chippendale is no case in point."

"Well, then, how the deuce was it you never got married yourself; eh, Archer?"

"How do you know I am not? You've met me here the last dozen years or more; but what do you know about me?"

Coningsby stared. Nobody did know much about Archer.

If you are," he said at last, "I can only say Mrs. Archer has a good many evenings to herself."

Archer grinned; he rather enjoyed the little mystification he knew existed about himself, as to what he did, where he lived, &c.

"There's a good many of us here," he said, "don't know much about each other's lives, when we've once passed the hall-porter."

"Perhaps not. Apropos to marriage. Do you know Lytlereck?"

"Hardly; but he didn't marry much money, did he?"

"No, what did he want to marry at all for? I never see anything of him now. There's another good fellow dropped out of one's circle. That's the worst of it, the minute a man's married he gets lost to his old pals."

"Don't think you revolve in a respectable orbit, Coningsby; Lytlereck's making a name with his pen; that last book of his is a good deal talked about."

"Bah!" said Coningsby, contemptuously, "with his knowledge of the Calendar and judgment of racing, his Derby pencillings should be worth more than he'll ever do with his pen. Don't think," he added, musingly, "his wife likes me. She can be very nice, I dare say; but rather gives me the idea she'd like to be a good deal the other way, as far as I am concerned."

"Lytlereck knows what he's about," said the other, "and is not such a fool as to think racing the way to keep a family."

"Come, you make a good thing of it."

"Ah! very; you always hear of a man's winnings, and never of his losings. No, old fellow, I can get my fun for my money; that's about all. Good night."

Coningsby sat musing and lazily watching the discomfiture of old Carribosh, to whom the inundation of the "height of the season" was a sore trouble. Irreverent youngsters took his particular chair, opened windows behind him, hinted that they had heard his stories before, if not perused them in the works of "Joseph Miller, Comedian," and otherwise made "the merry month of May" a social treadmill to the veteran.

At the present moment he was leaving the smoking-room in a shower of grunts, his custom always when much put out, and all the social *désagréments* above enumerated had been showered that evening on his thick though patriarchal head.

Coningsby's reverie was broken in upon by the advent of three or four men, one of whom exclaimed:

"Halloa! Colonel, how are you? charmed to meet once more."

"Crumbs, by Jove!" exclaimed Coningsby. "Sit down, old fellow. Bring Captain Rolls' drink here, waiter, and let's have some more cigars. When did you get home?"

"About a month ago, left the old corps at Lucknow; but hope they'll begin to work down to the coast with a view to England next year. Haven't seen you since that cheery night at Benares."

"Oh! the night we had such a 'go in' at loo, and cleaned out the wine-merchant. Won all he had down to his port-manteau. I remember I had to give him that back the next morning, and lend him two hundred rupees to get along with. Saw you rode a winner or two at the Lucknow Ski races afterwards. More than you could do now, Crumbs. You're getting d—d heavy, not the popular feather of the Crimean days."

"Quite true, and what's more, if you had to ride through Balaklava again, it would be long odds against your pulling

through. Poor old Trumpeter would find he'd twenty-eight pounds too much up, good horse as he was."

"Don't talk of it, I've subsided into the 'ornamental dragoon' the last two years, too heavy for real work. Look well in the long valley, yet, if they don't make the pace too strong for us. Up here for long!"

"Yes, mean to see the season out, now—that is, stay till after Goodwood."

"Come down and look at us on the Sunday. You know all our people, and of course there's a bed for you."

"Thanks. What's going to win the Derby?"

"Only wish I knew, backing the Frenchman, myself."

"Well, I've taken a long shot about The Carol, from a book-maker called Davidson. Do you know him?"

"Yes. Fancy Delpré could have told you a good deal about him, if he had been alive. He bets largely, now, though I recollect him a small man some three or four years ago."

"What do you think of The Carol?"

"Just the sort of 'good thing' poor Jack Travers would have been up to his eyes on."

"Confound it! that's not saying much! poor Jack's 'good things' were expensive as a rule."

"By the way, isn't Herries at home?"

"Yes; he's a Major now, you know."

Coningby nodded.

"Rum thing. I don't know whether you've heard it. He was down at Brighton, and there he met Langton and his daughter—the girl, you recollect, poor Travers was engaged to. As an old chum of Jack's, they were very civil to him, and it seems Miss Langton was never tired of talking to him about Jack and the Crimean times. At last Herries fell desperately in love, wanted to marry her; but she would have nothing to say to him in that way. Liked him well enough as a friend, but nothing more. Poor old fellow! he takes it grievously to heart."

"No ; you don't say so ! She's nice-looking, isn't she ?"

"I believe you ! Very handsome ! Wears mourning for Jack still."

"Does she ? Glad she didn't take Herries though. I object to my friends getting married on principle. Their wives, somehow, never seem to like me. I believe they fancy betting, unlimited loo, soda-and-brandy, with unholy hours, is my normal state."

"Not quite so bad as that," laughed Crumbs, "though in days 'lang syne,' the sun has found us 'playing for a loo.' What business had the sun to be up so early ?"

"Ah, why don't they make you astronomer royal, Crumbs, and let you regulate the planets generally ? What a devil of a mess you'd make of some people's noon !"

"Might make the world go pleasanter for you and 'the likes of you' all the same. Very jolly, all this, after the 'a-rid plains of Hin-dos-tan.' Comforting idea when you go to bed that there are no mosquitoes, and you don't want a punkah."

"*What did you do with your blue-eyed little flame at Lucknow ?*"

"Broke my heart about her," laughed Crumbs. "She jilted me shameful ! said she couldn't afford to wait while I made up my mind, and married a collector who looked like a badly-dried mummy. There's one consolation," continued Crumbs, with an expression of mock anguish ; "she's promised to take me for the second, and throws out hopes that the mummy won't last till I get back."

"And you ?" inquired Coningsby, smiling.

"Signed and sealed with a secret codicil in my own favour, conditional upon how the Collector cut up."

"Ah ; think you've got over it ?"

"Not the least, I'm quite heart-broken still, I assure you. Waiter, gin and soda. Don't look shocked, it's all her fault, the doctors say I'm shattered in mind and body, and require great care, change of scene, a deal of stimulant—"

"And a sick certificate," chimed in Coningsby. "You're a nice young man. How do, Thistleton?"

"How are you?" said that gentleman, nodding at the same time to Rolla. "Nice business this of Jack Delafield's, isn't it?"

"What," said Coningsby. "And who's Jack Delafield?" inquired Crumbs simultaneously.

"Jack Delafield," said Thistleton. "Who is he? well, he was a little before my time. Coningsby can recollect him; but I suppose there never was a much bigger rip came out, than the Honourable Jack; he'd made a name before he was three and twenty,

"'At which the world grew pale.'

that is would have done if the London world ever did change countenance. There was little, not positively felonious, that Master Jack had not committed by that time. He had run away with somebody else's wife, been convicted of cheating at cards, denounced as a defaulter and outlawed. Some how or other, he obtained a reversal of the outlawing, whether his friends paid or not, I don't know; but he came that far back again within the pale, though of course society still tabooed him. However, he was a plausible beggar, and some half-a-dozen years ago, down at Bath, he got hold of a good-looking widow with some money, and married her. A precious life, by all accounts, he seems to have led her ever since. At last she's summoned up pluck, and come before the Divorce Court, for a separation on grounds of cruelty, neglect, and the deuce knows what besides; but I hear nothing can be much worse than the way the Honourable Jack will come out of the whole business, which, from his antecedents, one can easily imagine."

"Whom did he marry? I mean, what was her previous name?"

"She was a Mrs. Englemere or Inglemere—I'm not quite sure which. Don't know anything about her; but if any

woman who married Jack Delafield didn't pay dearly for her folly, report has cruelly maligned him."

"Fancy I've met her in former days," said Coningsby.

"Well, you can't have met her recently, for they say he kept her almost a prisoner in some cottage down in Wales. Her friends knew nothing about it, for Delafield used to read all her letters, and make her answer them either according to his dictation or under his supervision. If he went away, there was a creature of his, nominally housekeeper, in reality, mistress and gaoler, who kept watch and ward. At last, it seems his misery touched the heart of some servant-girl, and by her assistance she managed to escape and take refuge with her friends. He has made use of all sorts of means to recover possession of her; but her friends, acting under the advice of a crafty old family solicitor, keep her out of the way till they can bring her forward at the trial. They say her terror of him is so great, that if he once got access to her, she would yield and go back to him."

"Yes, I can believe that; I recollect her now. A rather weak, vain, but uncommonly handsome woman. I daresay Jack Delafield's taken the good looks out of her. I think he was about the most finished blackguard I ever came across."

"Suppose he was. About bed time, isn't it? At all events I'm off."

"And I too. Come along, Crumba. Can't say how many cigars and sodas you've swallowed; but I'm quite sure it's much fixed air as is compatible with keeping your feet on the pavement."

"Libel, gross and hideous! Just let me light a baccy and walk home with, and I'm your man. Good-night, Thistletoe."

Down at Brighton, Cis Langton and his adopted daughter had finally fixed their home. Many an admiring eye is turned upon the handsome woman in mourning, so often seen passing

